

REPORT BY THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

State Dept
27 Feb 1950

on

THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA

THE PROBLEM

1. To undertake a determination of all practicable United States measures to protect its security in Indochina and to prevent the expansion of communist aggression in that area.

ANALYSIS

2. It is recognized that the threat of communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia. It is understood that Burma is weak internally and could be invaded without strong opposition or even that the Government of Burma could be subverted. However, Indochina is the area most immediately threatened. It is also the only area adjacent to communist China which contains a large European army, which along with native troops is now in armed conflict with the forces of communist aggression. A decision to contain communist expansion at the border of Indochina must be considered as a part of a wider study to prevent communist aggression into other parts of Southeast Asia.

3. A large segment of the Indochinese nationalist movement was seized in 1945 by Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese who under various aliases has served as a communist agent for thirty years. He has attracted non-communist as well as communist elements to his support. In 1946, he attempted, but failed to secure French agreement to his recognition as the head of a government of Vietnam. Since then he has directed a guerrilla army in raids against French installations and lines of communication. French forces which have been attempting to restore law and order found themselves pitted against a determined adversary who manufactures effective arms locally, who received supplies of arms from outside sources, who maintained no capital or permanent headquarters and who was, and is able, to disrupt and harass almost any area within Vietnam (Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina) at will.

4. The United States has, since the Japanese surrender, pointed out to the French Government that the legitimate nationalist aspirations of the people of Indochina must be satisfied, and that a return to the prewar colonial rule is not possible. The Department of State has pointed out to the French Government that it was

and is necessary to establish and support governments in Indochina particularly in Vietnam, under leaders who are capable of attracting to their causes the non-communist nationalist followers who had drifted to the Ho Chi Minh communist movement in the absence of any non-communist nationalist movement around which to plan their aspirations.

5. In an effort to establish stability by political means, where military measures had been unsuccessful, i.e., by attracting non-communist nationalists, now followers of Ho Chi Minh, to the support of anti-communist nationalist leaders, the French Government entered into agreements with the governments of the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia to elevate their status from protectorates to that of independent states within the French Union. The State of Vietnam was formed, with similar status, out of the former French protectorates of Tonkin, Annam and the former French Colony of Cochinchina. Each state received an increased degree of autonomy and sovereignty. Further steps towards independence were indicated by the French. The agreements were ratified by the French Government on 2 February 1950.

6. The Governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were officially recognized by the United States and the United Kingdom on February 7, 1950. Other Western powers have, or are committed to do likewise. The United States has consistently brought to the attention of non-communist Asian countries the danger of communist aggression which threatens them if communist expansion in Indochina is unchecked. As this danger becomes more evident it is expected to overcome the reluctance that they have had to recognize and support the three new states. We are therefore continuing to press those countries to recognize the new states. On January 18, 1950, the Chinese Communist Government announced its recognition of the Ho Chi Minh movement as the legal Government of Vietnam, while on January 30, 1950, the Soviet Government, while maintaining diplomatic relations with France, similarly announced its recognition.

7. The newly formed States of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia do not as yet have sufficient political stability nor military power to prevent the infiltration into their areas of Ho Chi Minh's forces. The French Armed Forces, while apparently effectively utilized at the present time, can do little more than to maintain the status quo. Their strength of some 140,000 does, however, represent an army in being and the only military bulwark in that area against the further expansion of communist aggression from either internal or external forces.

8. The presence of Chinese Communist troops along the border of Indochina makes it possible for arms, material and troops to move freely from Communist China to the northern Tonkin area now controlled by Ho Chi Minh. There is already evidence of movement of arms.

9. In the present state of affairs, it is doubtful that the combined native Indochinese and French troops can successfully contain Ho's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese Communist troops crossing the border, or Communist-supplied arms and material in quantity from outside Indochina strengthening Ho's forces.

CONCLUSIONS

10. It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

11. The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

12. Accordingly, the Departments of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina.

March 7, 1950

Dear General Burns:

Embodied below is a brief statement of Department of State policy in Indochina and Southeast Asia. I believe that an examination of this statement will facilitate your consideration of NSC 64.

The Department of State continues to hold that Southeast Asia is in grave danger of Communist domination as a consequence of aggression from Communist China and of internal subversive activities. The Department of State maintains that Indochina, subject as it is to the most immediate danger, is the most strategically important area of Southeast Asia.

The Department of State believes that within the limitations imposed by existing commitments and strategic priorities, the resources of the United States should be deployed to reserve Indochina and Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. The Department of State has accordingly already engaged all its political resources to the end that this object be secured. The Department is now engaged in the process of urgently examining what additional economic resources can effectively be engaged in the same operation.

It is now, in the opinion of the Department, a matter of the greatest urgency that the Department of Defense assess the strategic aspects of the situation and consider, from the military point of view, how the United States can best contribute to the prevention of further Communist encroachment in that area.

The military assessment requested above is necessary to a final determination by this Government of the manner in which United States policy in this area shall be executed.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Dean Rusk
Deputy Under Secretary

Major General James H. Burns,
Office of the Secretary
of Defense,
Department of Defense.

10 April 1950
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

(SECDEF HAS SEEN)

SUBJECT: Strategic Assessment of Southeast Asia

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have studied your memorandum, dated 10 March 1950, with its enclosures,* in which you requested their views regarding:

a. The strategic importance, from the military point of view, of Southeast Asia;

b. NSC 64, a report by the Department of State on the position of the United States with respect to Indochina, which is now before the National Security Council for consideration;

c. The measures that, from the military point of view, might be taken to prevent Communist expansion into Southeast Asia;

d. The order of magnitude and means of implementation of such measures; and

e. A French aide-memoire on the subject of aid for Indochina, dated 16 February 1950.

1. In light of U. S. strategic concepts, the integrity of the offshore island chain from Japan to Indonesia is of critical strategic importance to the United States.

2. The mainland states of Southeast Asia also are at present of critical strategic importance to the United States because:

a. They are the major sources of certain strategic materials required for the completion of United States stock pile projects;

b. The area is a crossroad of communications;

c. Southeast Asia is a vital segment in the line of containment of communism stretching from Japan southward and around to the Indian Peninsula. The security of the three

*See letter from Mr. Rusk to General Burns, dated March 7, 1950, reproduced at the end of this memorandum.

forces are allied with them. In addition, the generally inadequate indigenous forces of the independent states are actively engaged in attempting to maintain internal security in the face of Communist aggression tactics.

5. It appears obvious from intelligence estimates that the situation in Southeast Asia has deteriorated and, without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated. In general, the basic conditions of political and economic stability in this area, as well as the military and internal security conditions, are unsatisfactory. These factors are closely inter-related and it is probable that, from the long-term point of view, political and economic stability is the controlling factor. On the other hand, the military situation in some areas, particularly Indochina, is of pressing urgency.

6. ...With respect to the measures which, from the United States military point of view, might be taken to prevent Communist expansion in Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend early implementation of military aid programs for Indochina, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma. Malaya might also be included provided the British by their actions in the areas in Asia where they have primary interest evince a determined effort to resist the expansion of communism and present sufficient military justification for aid. The effectiveness of these military aid programs would be greatly increased by appropriate public statements of United States policy in Southeast Asia.

7. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the military aid from funds already allocated by the President for the states of Southeast Asia be delivered at the earliest practicable date. They further recommend that the presently unallocated portion of the President's emergency fund under Section 303 of Public Law 329 (81st Congress, 1st Session), be planned and programmed as a matter of urgency.

8. Precise determination of the amounts required for military aid, special covert operations, and concomitant economic and psychological programs in Southeast Asia cannot be made at this time since the financial requirements will, to a large extent, depend on the success of aid and other programs now in the process of implementation. In the light of the world situation, however, it would appear that military aid programs and other measures will be necessary in Southeast Asia at least during the next fiscal year and in at least the same general over-all order of magnitude. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, strongly recommend that appropriations for over-all use in the general area of Asia be sought for the next fiscal year in terms similar to those under Section 303 of Public Law 329 (81st Congress, 1st Session). It is believed that approximately \$100,000,000 will be required for the military portion of this program.

9. In view of the history of military aid in China, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urge that these aid programs be subject, in any event, to the following conditions:

a. That United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather, that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs; and

b. That requests for military equipment be screened first by an officer designated by the Department of Defense and on duty in the recipient state. These requests should be subject to his determination as to the feasibility and satisfactory coordination of specific military operations. It should be understood that military aid will only be considered in connection with such coordinated operational plans as are approved by the representative of the Department of Defense on duty in the recipient country. Further, in conformity with current procedures, the final approval of all programs for military materiel will be subject to the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

10. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that a Southeast Asia Aid Committee be appointed with State, Defense and ECA representation which will be responsible for the development and implementation of the program for the general area of Southeast Asia. Requests for aid should be screened by the field representatives of the committee in consultation with the local authorities in the countries concerned.

11. Present arrangements for military aid to Indonesia through the military attaches and to the Philippines through the Joint United States Military Aid Group appear to be satisfactory and should be continued.

12. A small military aid group should be established in Thailand to operate in conformity with the requirements in paragraph 9 above. Arrangements for military aid should be made directly with the Thai Government.

13. In view of the very unsettled conditions in Burma, the program for military aid to that country should, for the time being at least, be modest. The arrangements should be made after consultation with the British, and could well be handled by the United States Armed Forces attaches to that country. Arrangements for military aid to Malaya, if and when authorized, should be handled similarly except that request should, in the first instance, originate with British authorities.

14. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize the political implications involved in military aid to Indochina. It must be appreciated,

however, that French armed forces of approximately 140,000 men are in the field and that if these were to be withdrawn this year because of political considerations, the Bao Dai regime probably could not survive even with United States aid. If the United States were now to insist upon independence for Vietnam and a phased French withdrawal from that country, this might improve the political situation. The French could be expected to interpose objections to, and certainly delays in, such a program. Conditions in Indochina, however, are unstable and the situation is apparently deteriorating rapidly so that the urgent need for at least an initial increment of military and economic aid is psychologically overriding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, recommend the provision of military aid to Indochina at the earliest practicable date under a program to implement the President's action approving the allocation of 15 million dollars for Indochina and that corresponding increments of political and economic aid be programmed on an interim basis without prejudice to the pattern of the policy for additional military, political and economic aid that may be developed later.

15. In view of the considerations set forth in paragraph 14 above, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the immediate establishment of a small United States military aid group in Indochina, to operate in conformity with the requirements in paragraph 9 above. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would expect the senior member of this group to sit in consultation with military representatives of France and Vietnam and possibly of Laos and Cambodia. In addition to screening requests for materiel, he would be expected to insure full coordination of military plans and efforts between the French and Vietnamese forces and to supervise the allocation of materiel. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe in the possibility of success of a prompt coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid to Southeast Asia and feel that such a success might well lead to the gaining of the initiative in the struggle in that general area.

16. China is the vital strategic area in Asia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are firmly of the opinion that attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China. Resolution of the situation facing Southeast Asia would therefore, be facilitated if prompt and continuing measures were undertaken to reduce the pressure from Communist China. In this connection, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have noted the evidences of renewed vitality and apparent increased effectiveness of the Chinese Nationalist forces.

17. The Joint Chiefs of Staff suggest the following measures with military implications:

a. An increased number of courtesy or "show the flag" visits to Southeast Asian states;

b. Recognition of the "port closure" of Communist China seaports by the Nationalists as a de facto blockade so long as it is effective. Such action should remove some of the pressure, direct and indirect, upon Southeast Asia; should be of assistance to the anti-Communist forces engaged in interference with the lines of communication to China; and should aggravate the economic problems and general unrest in Communist China;

c. A program of special covert operations designed to interfere with Communist activities in Southeast Asia; and

d. Long-term measures to provide for Japan and the other offshore islands a secure source of food and other strategic materials from non-Communist held areas in the Far East.

18. Comments on the French aide-memoire of 16 February 1950, are contained in the substance of this memorandum. The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not concur in the French suggestion for conversations between the "French and American General Staffs" on the subject of Indochina since the desired ends will best be served through conferences in Indochina among the United States military aid group and military representatives of France, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are not unmindful of the need for collaboration and consultation with the British and French Governments on Southeast Asia matters and recommend, therefore, that military representatives participate in the forthcoming tripartite discussions on Southeast Asia to be held at the forthcoming meeting of the Foreign Ministers.

FOR THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF:

/s/ OMAR N. BRADLEY
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Secretary of State

May 4, 1950

Mr. Griffin

Conference on Indo-China - May 2, 1950.

1. The Indo-China situation cannot be maintained in its present status quo.

Time is of the essence in the Vietnam situation. Bao Dai and his Government cannot maintain a status quo. Bao Dai must either quickly win additional support and begin showing gains in prestige or there will be a falling away of his present following. There is general cynicism in Vietnam about the French willingness to permit reasonable self-government, and that cynicism spreads to the Bao Dai Government. Bao Dai at present represents a minority group, but he still is potentially capable of achieving substantial majority support if he can prove that he is taking over authority and responsibility and is exercising them. He must be given face. Unless the present trend is materially and almost immediately corrected, Bao Dai's opportunity will be irretrievably lost and his strength will run to water. To salvage the situation a fundamental agreement must be brought about with the French, followed quickly and with certainty with action designed to make Bao Dai a success. If Bao Dai once starts slipping, it will be impossible to restore him.

2. Problem of a foundation for agreement.

In order to have a firm basis of agreement with the French regarding U.S. relations with the State of Vietnam and the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos, it is almost a necessity to secure from the French a rational evaluation of what they expect of Indo-China, a forecast of the situation they reasonably believe can be brought about that would satisfy the aspirations of the people of Vietnam within the French Union.

The French themselves were forced to the conclusion that a conclusive military solution of their problem was unattainable and they resorted, therefore, to the effort to bring about a political solution. In that effort the United States became involved in the recognition of the Government of Vietnam.

The French

The French also recognize the fact that they cannot afford a continued military cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year in a campaign that has failed and that has no prospect of bringing about a military solution. As MFP aid is subsequently reduced, it will be impossible for the French to carry this expense. Even today, with the help of GNF, domestic plans of the French Government are deeply affected by this drain, which indirectly but powerfully affects the Government's capacity to deal with labor, social and educational exigencies at home.

The French are also aware, realistically, of the military weaknesses on the continent due to the maintenance of a military establishment in Indo-China that absorbs half of the regular army and the best cadres for troop training, whose losses are continuous, and whose depletion of French officer strength equals the output of new officers from the French military academics. This, incidentally though importantly, affects the United States position in military assistance to the Continent.

Despite French sentimental aspirations for absorbing colonial areas within the body and spirit of "metropolitan France," there is no doubt that the French are realistic enough, when not emotionally disturbed, to appreciate the fact that the peoples of Vietnam can no longer be "integrated" in that respect.

Therefore it appears that the time has come that an entirely rational French consideration of this problem must take place, that can be the foundation of policy considerations. It is strictly necessary that this consideration be made now, so that U.S. policy may reasonably and justifiably work in cooperation with the French in attempting to make firm and workable a self-governed Vietnam State conditioned to find it desirable and advantageous to be a part of the French Union.

In short, we must find out what the French expect of Vietnam.

3. Decisions and actions necessary to create public respect for the Bao Dai government.

- a. A clear definition of the French Union, its meaning, its responsibilities and guarantees including the guarantee of a method for "evolutionary" treatment of countries accepted as partners within the French Union. These conditions have never been defined, and no one knows what the French Union means.

- b. Implementation

- b. Implementation of the provisions of the March 9 agreement. This should not be a mean or petty literal and parsimonious interpretation, but broad and generous. Not only have the French been laggard in carrying out the terms of the agreement but they have been jealous and circumscribed in interpretation of every provision. (In the matter of technical assistance to the Viets, the French Secretariat was adamant in its opposition to any form of American or other foreign aid, stating that such aid was a violation of the agreement.)
- c. The attitude of the French towards the Viet Government must be one of acceptance of a fact and a determination to make a success of that Government. This may be contrary to human nature, but it is doubtful if that Government can succeed without the most generous, if not passionate, French assistance. This assistance must be on a subordinate level, thorough and complete. It is indispensable. Until now the French attitude has been to point with scorn at the failures and aberrations of the untrained Viet Government leaders and to take the "I told you so" attitude.
- d. Acceptance of the principle of bilateral relations between other governments and the Bao Dai regime. This will be hard for the French to take. They desire to maintain the form or myth of a quadripartite arrangement. While a form of at least tripartite arrangement is necessary among the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian Governments -- for physical and economic reasons -- it is imperative for the prestige of the Bao Dai Government for it to be able to conduct some dealings with other governments. This should apply at least to a substantial part of the proposed economic aid program. When the U.S. and Britain recognized Bao Dai, that recognition was taken as a bilateral action. In itself it established a precedent. This is a vital issue, and one of the most difficult to work out.

e. Turning

- e. Turning over to Bao Dai of the No. 1 residence in Hanoi, now occupied by the French High Commissioner. This is symbolic as well as practical. This is undoubtedly the reason why it is impossible for Bao Dai to take residence in the capital city, where his presence would be a sign of the reality of his Government. Even Pignon is opposed to this, on the grounds that it would affect French morale. Nevertheless this cannot be overlooked.
- f. Statement of the French that their purpose in training and preparing for field operations of a Bao Dai army is part of their plan for the complete protection of the country by Viet forces, which thereafter would enable them to withdraw.
- g. There are many other actions, most of them minor in importance in western eyes but highly significant to Orientals, that can be taken to set up the prestige and position of Bao Dai. Some of these proposals have been contained in Gullion's cables.

4. Current Military Problems.

A French army of mixed but "regular" troops of approximately 130,000 men is maintained in Indo-China, chiefly in the Province of Tonkin, to prevent the overrunning of the Province and the Red River valley by the Viet Minh and to stand guard against Chinese invasion of infiltration.

The presence of this army is indispensable even though many Bao Dai supporters would prefer to have it removed forthwith. These people believe they could settle their differences with Ho Chi Minh by negotiation if the French were withdrawn. The latter point of view is not realistic, and there is good reason to believe that withdrawal of French forces would quickly lead to Communist takeover.

French-trained Viet troops are effective and loyal, and those embedded in the French army are said to be the equal of any colonial troops. The French are vigorously training approximately 50,000 Viet troops for the Bao Dai army. Such units, once tried and found satisfactory,

can in

can in time begin to take over French garrisoned areas and make possible the return to the Continent of regular French contingents.

An American arms program can be used to stimulate this training and replacement program.

There is the danger that French public sentiment -- and some practical military pressure -- might cause the French to threaten to withdraw entirely from Indo-China and "cut their losses", if pressure on the French for "evolutionary" treatment of the Viet political problem became too severe. This consideration cannot be overlooked when working for concessions. There is already a strong feeling in many French quarters that Indo-China should be written off before more blood and treasure are lost.

As the French are required by the situation and by our insistence to turn over more authority to the Viet Government, it must be recognized that the morale of the French army might be affected. No measure could influence that situation more favorably than if the United States were willing to pledge sea and air support for the Viet-French forces in the event of the threat of invasion of Vietnam from Communist China.

Generals Carpentier and Alessandri are officers of the highest calibre. Carpentier's apparent acquiescence to the arming of several Bao Dai battalions with American small arms is an indication that he is willing to yield on some subjects on which he had appeared to be adamant. He speaks frequently of his friendship and great respect for American Generals Gruenther and Mark Clark. In matters affecting important military decisions and American policy in the Indo-China field it might be most useful to send General Gruenther there, after a complete policy briefing, to discuss and review the entire military subject with Carpentier.

RAGriffin:ckg

5-4-60

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

MAY 11, 1950
NO. 485

At his press conference today, Acting Secretary Webb made the following statement:

AID TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

A special survey mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, has just returned from Southeast Asia and reported on economic and technical assistance needed in that area. Its over-all recommendations for the area are modest and total in the neighborhood of \$60 million. The Department is working on plans to implement that program at once.

Secretary Acheson on Monday in Paris cited the urgency of the situation applying in the associated states of Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia. The Department is working jointly with ECA to implement the economic and technical assistance recommendations for Indochina as well as the other states of Southeast Asia and anticipates that this program will get underway in the immediate future.

Military assistance for Southeast Asia is being worked out by the Department of Defense in cooperation with the Department of State, and the details will not be made public for security reasons.

Military assistance needs will be met from the President's emergency fund of \$75 million provided under MDAP for the general area of China.

Economic assistance needs will be met from the ECA China Aid funds, part of which both Houses of Congress have indicated will be made available for the general area of China. Final legislative action is still pending on this authorization but is expected to be completed within the next week.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

FOR THE PRESS

MAY 25, 1950
No. 545

U.S. FORMALLY ANNOUNCES INTENT TO ESTABLISH
AN ECONOMIC AID MISSION TO THE THREE ASSO-
CIATED STATES OF INDOCHINA

On Wednesday, May 24, Charge d'Affaires Edmund Gullion delivered the following letter to the Chiefs of State of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia or their representatives at Saigon. Simultaneously, Ambassador Bruce delivered an identical letter to the President of the French Union in Paris.

The text of the letter follows:

"I have the honor to inform you that the Government of the United States has decided to initiate a program of economic aid to the States of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. My Government has reached this decision in order to assist Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to restore stability and pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

"With these purposes in mind, the United States Government is establishing, with headquarters in Saigon and associated with United States Legation, a special economic mission to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. This mission will have the responsibility of working with the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and with the French High Commissioner in developing and carrying out a coordinated program of economic aid designed to assist the three countries in restoring their normal economic life. The members of the American economic mission will at all times be subject to the authority of the Government of the United States and will not become a part of the administrations of the Associated States.

"The Government of the United States recognizes that this American assistance will be complementary to the effort made by the three Associated States and France, without any intention of substitution. American aid is designed to reinforce the joint effort of France and the governments and peoples

of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, on whom rests the primary responsibility for the restoration of security and stability.

"United States economic aid will be granted in accordance with separate bilateral agreements between each of the Associated States and the United States of America. The approval of these agreements will be subject to legal conventions existing between the Associated States and France. Initial economic aid operations, however, may begin prior to the conclusion of these agreements.

c "The United States Government is of the opinion that it would be desirable for the three governments and the French High Commissioner to reach agreement among themselves for the coordination of those matters relating to the aid program that are of common interest. The American economic mission will maintain contact with the three Associated States, with the French High Commissioner in Indochina and, if desired, with any body which may be set up by the Associated States and France in connection with the aid program.

"Mr. Robert Blum has been appointed Chief of the United States special economic mission to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

"Identical letters are being addressed today to the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and the President of the French Union."

The letter of intent refers only to economic aid which will be based on the recommendations of the Griffin mission which recently made a survey trip to Southeast Asia and carried on consultations with the leaders and technicians of Indochina.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced the policy of United States aid to Indochina at Paris on May 8 when he released this statement following an exchange of views with Foreign Minister Schuman of France:

"The Foreign Minister and I have just had an exchange of views on the situation in Indochina and are in general agreement both as to the urgency of the situation in that area and as to the

necessity for remedial action. We have noted the fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos which now enjoy independence within the French Union is primarily the responsibility of France and the governments and peoples of Indochina. The United States recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives.

"The United States Government convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development."

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

JUNE 3, 1950
NO. 583

The following is the text of a letter of June 2 from Secretary of State Dean Acheson to the Honorable Robert Allen Griffin, upon the conclusion of his assignment as Head of the Special Economic Mission to Southeast Asia:

"Dear Mr. Griffin:

"I congratulate you upon the successful conclusion of the Special Economic Mission to Southeast Asia which you led and extend to you and those on your staff my warmest personal thanks for the careful and thorough job you did. In surveying so large an area under conditions which called for constant diplomatic tact and skillful technical appraisal under the severest time pressure you performed with outstanding ability a most difficult assignment.

"On the basis of your recommendations the United States Government is launching a program which will offer rapid economic aid to those countries for which you drew up plans. The purpose of this assistance, as you well know, is to mobilize the natural and human resources of these countries for the improvement of the general welfare of the people and the strengthening of democratic governments throughout Southeast Asia.

"The fresh approach you took, unhampered by preconceived plans, and the creative ability which you displayed in working out a program with the approval of the Asian governments concerned have contributed much to the auspicious launching of this important program.

"Sincerely yours,

"DEAN ACHESON

"The Honorable
"Robert Allen Griffin,
"Pebble Beach, California."

* * *

JUNE 27, 1950

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

In Korea the Government forces, which were armed to prevent border raids and to preserve internal security, were attacked by invading forces from North Korea. The Security Council of the United Nations called upon the invading troops to cease hostilities and to withdraw to the 38th parallel. This they have not done, but on the contrary have pressed the attack. The Security Council called upon all members of the United Nations to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution. In these circumstances I have ordered United States air and sea forces to give the Korean Government troops cover and support.

The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war. It has defied the orders of the Security Council of the United Nations issued to preserve international peace and security. In these circumstances the occupation of Formosa by Communist forces would be a direct threat to the security of the Pacific area and to United States forces performing their lawful and necessary functions in that area.

Accordingly, I have ordered the Seventh Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa. As a corollary of this action I am calling upon the Chinese Government on Formosa to cease all air and sea operations against the mainland. The Seventh Fleet will see that this is done. The determination of the future status of Formosa must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations.

I have also directed that United States Forces in the Philippines be strengthened and that military assistance to the Philippine Government be accelerated.

I have similarly directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of

France and the Associated States in Indo China and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces.

I know that all members of the United Nations will consider carefully the consequences of this latest aggression in Korea in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations. A return to the rule of force in international affairs would have far reaching effects. The United States will continue to uphold the rule of law.

I have instructed Ambassador Austin, as the representative of the United States to the Security Council, to report these steps to the Council.

25 July 1950

1. Existing Policy

a. U.S. Policy with respect to Indo-China as approved by the President on 24 April 1950 concludes that:

(1) Indo-China is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

(2) The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indo-China were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

(3) Accordingly, the Departments of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indo-China.

b. On 10 April 1950 the JCS concurred in the above conclusions and recommended early implementation of military aid programs for Indo-China, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Burma. Such aid programs to be closely controlled and be integrated with political and economic programs.

c. On 7 July 1950 the JCS (J.C.S. 1924/14) approved the following in their review of NSC 73.

"If the Chinese Communists provide overt military assistance to Southeast Asian Communist elements, the United States should prevail upon the British to reverse their proffers of recognition to Communist China and to provide such military assistance as is practicable to assist the Burmese and/or the French in resisting Chinese Communist aggression. In addition:

"a. If overt military assistance is provided the Viet Minh forces of Indo-China, the United States should increase its MDAP assistance to the French and urge the French to continue an active defense, with the United States giving consideration to the provision of air and naval assistance.

"b. The United States should ask the United Nations to call upon member nations to make forces available to resist the Chinese Communist aggression."

Chinese Communist military moves against Southeast Asia states in the near future are possible and in such an event the U.S. should be prepared to provide military assistance short of actual participation of U.S. Armed Forces at this time.

d. On 14 July the JSPC submitted a report (J.C.S. 1924/20 - Not yet approved) for consideration by the JCS which included the following with reference to Southeast Asia:

"The French military position in Indo-China has continued to improve. . . . No unusual Chinese Communist or Vietminh activities have occurred since the Korean invasion. While the entire East Asia situation is potentially explosive there are no present indications that the situation will be immediately worsened unless the Korean situation further deteriorates. With respect to Burma, Thailand, and Malaya, internal subversive moves will probably remain the chief threats to the established governments. Chinese Communists would probably move against these countries only if first successful in Indo-China. . ."

"e. Southeast Asia

"(1) In the event of Chinese Communist moves against Indo-China or Burma, U.S. military equipment and supplies would be required on an increased scale and U.S. naval and air forces might be called upon to assist the French in Indo-China. It is unlikely that U.S. forces would be employed in Burma. This is considered to be an area of British responsibility.

"(2) If Indo-China, Burma and Thailand were to fall under Communist domination, British forces in Malaya should be augmented. Except for possible naval support, it is unlikely that U.S. armed forces would be employed in Malaya since this is an area of British responsibility."

NSC STAFF STUDY

on

UNITED STATES OBJECTIVES AND COURSES OF ACTION WITH
RESPECT TO COMMUNIST AGGRESSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA*

THE PROBLEM

1. To determine the policy of the United States toward the countries of Southeast Asia, and in particular, the courses of action which may be taken by the United States to strengthen and coordinate resistance to communism on the part of the governments and peoples of the area, to prevent Chinese Communist aggression, and to meet such aggression should it occur.

ANALYSIS

I. CONSEQUENCES TO THE UNITED STATES OF COMMUNIST DOMINATION
OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

2. Communist domination of Southeast Asia, whether by means of overt invasion, subversion, or accommodation on the part of the indigenous governments, would be critical to United States security interests. Communist success in this area would spread doubt and fear among other threatened non-communist countries as to the ability of the United States and the United Nations to halt communist aggression elsewhere. It would strengthen the claim that the advance of communism is inexorable and encourage countries vulnerable to Soviet pressure to adopt policies of neutralism or accommodation. Successful overt Chinese Communist aggression in this area, especially if achieved without encountering more than token resistance on the part of the United States or the United Nations, would have critical psychological and political consequences which would probably include the relatively swift alignment of the rest of Asia and thereafter or the Middle East to communism, thereby endangering the stability and security of Europe. Such a communist success might nullify the psychological advantages accruing to the free world by reason of its response to the aggression in Korea.

3. The fall of Southeast Asia would underline the apparent economic advantages to Japan of association with the communist-dominated Asian sphere. Exclusion of Japan from trade with Southeast Asia would seriously affect the Japanese

*The term Southeast Asia is used herein to mean Indochina, Burma, Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, and Indonesia.

economy, and increase Japan's dependence on United States aid. In the long run the loss of Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to the Soviet Bloc.

4. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin. Access to these materials by the Western Powers and their denial to the Soviet Bloc is important at all times and particularly in the event of global war. Communist control over the rice surpluses of the Southeast Asian mainland would provide the USSR with a powerful economic weapon in its relations with other countries of the Far East. Indonesia is a secondary source of petroleum whose importance would be enhanced by the denial to the Western Powers of petroleum sources in the Middle East. Malaya is the largest net dollar earner for the United Kingdom, and its loss would seriously aggravate the economic problems facing the UK.

5. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the United States position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental United States security interests in the Far East. The extension of communist power via Burma would augment the communist threat to India and Pakistan and strengthen the groups within those countries which favor accommodation. However, such an event would probably result in a stiffer attitude toward communism on the part of the Indian government.

6. Communist domination of mainland Southeast Asia would place unfriendly forces astride the most direct and best-developed sea and air routes between the Western Pacific and India and the Near East. In the event of global war, the development of Soviet submarine and air bases in mainland Southeast Asia might compel the detour of U.S. and allied shipping and air transportation in the Southeast Asia region via considerably longer alternate routes to the south. This extension of friendly lines of communication would hamper U.S. strategic movements in this region and tend to isolate the major non-communist bases in the Far East--the offshore island chain and Australia--from existing bases in East Africa and the Near and Middle East, as well as from potential bases on the Indian sub-continent.

7. Besides disrupting established lines of communication in the area, the denial of actual military facilities in mainland Southeast Asia--in particular, the loss of the major naval operating bases at Singapore--would compel the utilization of

less desirable peripheral bases. Soviet exploitation of the naval and air bases in mainland Southeast Asia probably would be limited by the difficulties of logistic support but would, nevertheless, increase the threat to existing lines of communication.

II. REGIONAL STRATEGY

8. The continued integrity of the individual countries of Southeast Asia is to a large extent dependent upon a successful coordination of political and military measures for the entire area. The development of practical measures aimed at preventing the absorption of these countries into the Soviet orbit must therefore recognize this interdependence and must, in general, seek courses of action for the area as a whole.

9. However, it must be recognized that the governments and peoples of Southeast Asia have little in common other than their geographic proximity and their newly awakened nationalism and anti-colonialism. For the most part, their economies are competitive rather than complementary. The countries are divided internally and from each other by language and ethnic differences. The several nationalities and tribal groups are the heirs of centuries of warfare, jealousy, and mutual distrust. In addition, their present governments are sharply divided in their attitudes toward the current East-West struggle. The governments of the three Associated States of Indochina are not recognized by any other Asian states except Nationalist China and Thailand.

10. In the strategic sense, the defense of Tonkin is important to the defense of mainland Southeast Asia. If Communist forces should succeed in driving the French Union forces from Tonkin, military action in the remainder of Indochina might have to be limited to delaying action and the perimeter defense of certain coastal areas pending reinforcement or evacuation. With the appearance of communist success, native support would probably swing increasingly to the Viet Minh.

11. Thailand has no common border with China and no strong internal communist element. It adjoins areas of Indochina now controlled by the Viet Minh, but the border areas are remote and difficult. Hence, communist seizure of Thailand is improbable except as a result of the prior loss of either Burma or Indochina.

12. Communist control of either Indochina or Burma would expose Thailand to infiltration and severe political pressures.

as well as to the threat of direct attack. Unless substantial outside aid were forthcoming, it is possible that in such a case, political pressure alone would be sufficient to bring about the accommodation of Thailand to international communism within a year. However, substantial aid, together with assurance of support by the United States and the UN might be sufficient to preserve a non-communist government in Thailand in spite of any form of pressure short of overt attack.

13. Thailand would be difficult to defend against an overt attack from the east by way of the traditional invasion route through Cambodia. Thailand is more defensible against attack from Burma owing to the mountainous terrain and poor communications of the Thai-Burmese border. In either case it might be possible to defend an area in southern Thailand centering on Bangkok. Since any attack on Thailand would necessarily be preceded by communist encroachment on Indochina or Burma, the defense of Thailand would probably be part of a broader pattern of hostilities.

14. If the loss of Thailand followed the loss of Burma, the defense of Indochina would be out-flanked; and any substantial communist forces based on Thailand would render the position of the French Union Forces in Indochina untenable in the long run. If the collapse of Thailand followed the loss of Indochina, the psychological and political consequences would accelerate the deterioration of Burma. However, the military consequences in such a case would be less immediate, owing to the difficult terrain of the Thai-Burmese border country.

15. Communist control of Thailand would aggravate the already serious security problem presented by the Thai-Malayan border and greatly increase the difficulties of the British security forces in Malaya. However, assuming control of the sea by the Western Powers, Malaya offers a defensible position against even a full-scale land attack. The Kra Isthmus of the Malayan Peninsula would afford the best secondary line of defense against total communist domination of Southeast Asia and the East Indies. Such a defense would effectively protect Indonesia against external communist pressure. By thus defending Malaya and Indonesia, the anti-communist forces would continue to hold the most important strategic material resources of the area, as well as strategic air and naval bases and lines of communication.

16. The strategic interdependence of the countries in Southeast Asia, and the cumulative effect of a successful

communist penetration in any one area, point to the importance of action designed to forestall any aggression by the Chinese Communists. The most effective possible deterrent would be a joint warning by the United States and certain other governments regarding the grave consequences of Chinese aggression against Southeast Asia, and implying the threat of retaliation against Communist China itself. Such a warning should be issued in conjunction with other nations, including at least the United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand. Participation in such a warning involves all the risks and disadvantages of a precommitment to take action in future and unknown circumstances. However, these disadvantages must be weighed against the alternative of a costly effort to repel Chinese invasion after it has actually occurred. A second, but probably less effective, means of attempting to deter such an invasion would be to focus world attention on the continuing threat of Chinese Communist aggression against Southeast Asia and to make clear to the Soviet and Chinese Communist Governments the fact that the United States views the situation in Southeast Asia with great concern. In fact, statements along these lines have already been made. Such means might also include a Peace Observation Commission, if desired and requested by the countries concerned, public addresses by U.S. officials, and "show the flag" visits by naval and air units.

17. The Chinese Nationalist forces represent considerable reserve upon which to draw in the event of military action against Communist China. The deficiency in equipment and training seriously limits the possible employment of these forces at present, however, continuation of our training and supply efforts should serve to alleviate these deficiencies. The manner of employment of these forces is beset not only with military but also with political difficulties. Hence the decision as to the best use of these forces cannot be made at this time. Nevertheless, we should be prepared to make the best practicable use of this military augmentation in light of the circumstances existing at the time.

III. INDOCHINA

18. In the long run, the security of Indochina against communism will depend upon the development of native governments able to command the support of the masses of the people and national armed forces capable of relieving the French of the major burden of maintaining internal security. Some progress is being made in the formation and development of national armies. However, the Vietnamese Government has been slow to assume its responsibilities and has continued to suffer from a lack of strong leadership. It has had to contend with: (a) lingering Vietnamese suspicion of any French-supported regime, combined with the apathetic and "fence sitting" attitude of the bulk of the people; (b) the difficulty, common to all new and inexperienced governments, of training the necessary personnel and building an efficient administration; and (c) the failure of factional and sectional groups to unite in a concerted national effort.

19. The U.S. economic aid program for Indochina has as its objectives to increase production and thereby offset the military drain on the economy of the Associated States; to increase popular support for the Government by improving the effectiveness of Government services; to make the Government and the people aware of America's interest in their independence and welfare; and to use economic aid as a means of supporting the military effort. Because of their strained budgetary situation, the Associated States cannot meet the local currency costs of the projects; about 60 percent of the program funds is, therefore, devoted to importing needed commodities which are sold to generate counterpart.

20. The military situation in Indochina continues to be one of stalemate. Increased U.S. aid to the Franco-Vietnamese forces has been an essential factor in enabling them to withstand recent communist attacks. However, Chinese aid to the Viet Minh in the form of logistic support, training, and technical advisors is increasing at least at a comparable rate. The prospect is for a continuation of the present stalemate in the absence of intervention by important forces other than those presently engaged.

21. While it is unlikely under the present circumstances that the French will suffer a military defeat in Indochina, there is a distinct possibility that the French Government will soon conclude that France cannot continue indefinitely to carry the burden of her total military commitments. From the French point of view, the possible means of lessening the

present burden include: (1) a settlement with the communists in Indochina; (2) an agreement to internationalize the action in Indochina; (3) reduction of the NATO obligations of France.

22. A settlement based on a military armistice would be more complicated in Indochina than in the case of Korea. Much of Indochina is not firmly under the control of either side, but subject to occasional forays from both. Areas controlled by the opposing sides are interspersed, and lines of contact are fluid. Because of the weakness of the native governments, the dubious attitudes of the population even in areas under French control, and the certainty of continued communist pressure, it is highly probable that any settlement based on a withdrawal of French forces would be tantamount to handing over Indochina to communism. The United States should therefore continue to oppose any negotiated settlement with the Viet Minh.

23. In the event that information and circumstances point to the conclusion that France is no longer prepared to carry the burden in Indochina, or if France presses for a sharing of the responsibility for Indochina, whether in the UN or directly with the U.S. Government, the United States should oppose a French withdrawal and consult with the French and British concerning further measures to be taken to safeguard the area from communist domination. In anticipation of these possibilities, the United States should urgently re-examine the situation with a view to determining:

a. Whether U.S. participation in an international undertaking would be warranted.

b. The general nature of the contributions which the United States, with other friendly governments, might be prepared to make.

24. A cessation of hostilities in Korea would greatly increase the logistical capability of the Chinese Communists to support military operations in Indochina. A Korean peace would have an even more decisive effect in increasing Chinese air capabilities in that area. Recent intelligence reports indicate increased Chinese Communist military activity in the Indochinese border area. If the Chinese Communists directly intervene with large forces over and above those introduced as individuals or in small units, the French would probably be driven back to a beachhead around Haiphong. The French should be able to hold this beachhead for only a limited time at best in the absence of timely and substantial outside support.

25. In view of the world-wide reaction to overt aggression in Korea, Communist China may prefer to repeat in Indochina the method of "volunteer" intervention. Inasmuch as the French do not control the border between China and Indochina nor large areas north of Hanoi, it may be difficult to detect the extent of preparation for such intervention. It is important to U.S. security interests to maintain the closest possible consultation with the French Government on the buildup of Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina. The Government of France has agreed to consult with the United States before it requests UN or other international action to oppose Chinese Communist aggression in Indochina in order that the two countries may jointly evaluate the extent of Chinese Communist intervention.

26. If it is thus determined that Chinese Communist forces (including volunteers) have overtly intervened in the conflict in Indochina, or are covertly participating to such an extent as to jeopardize retention of the Tonkin Delta by the French forces, the United States should support the French to the greatest extent possible, preferably under the auspices of the UN. It is by no means certain that an appropriate UN resolution could be obtained. Favorable action in the UN would depend upon a change in the attitude of those governments which view the present regime in Indochina as a continuation of French colonialism. A new communist aggression might bring about a reassessment of the situation on the part of these governments and an increased recognition of the danger. Accordingly, it is believed that a UN resolution to oppose the aggression could be passed in the General Assembly by a small margin.

27. Even if it is not possible to obtain a UN resolution in such a case, the United States should seek the maximum possible international support for and participation in any international collective action in support of France and the Associated States. The United States should take appropriate military action against Communist China as part of a UN collective action or in conjunction with France and the United Kingdom and other friendly governments. However, in the absence of such support, it is highly unlikely that the United States would act unilaterally. It is probable however, that the United States would find some support and token participation at least from the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries.

28. The U.S. forces which would be committed, and the manner of their employment, as well as the military equipment

which could be furnished to bolster the French Union forces, would be dependent upon certain factors which cannot now be predicted with accuracy. These include the extent of progress in U.S. rearmament, whether or not hostilities in Korea were continuing, and strategic developments in other parts of the world. It would be desirable to avoid the use of major U.S. ground forces in Indochina. Other effective means of opposing the aggression would include naval, air and logistical support of the French Union forces, naval blockade of Communist China, and attacks by land and carrier-based aircraft on military targets in Communist China. The latter could be effective against the long, tenuous, and vulnerable supply lines by which Chinese operations in Indochina would have to be supported. In the event of a forced evacuation, U.S. forces might provide cover and assistance. United Kingdom participation in these measures might well result in the seizure of Hong Kong by the Chinese Communists.

29. It is recognized that the commitment of U.S. military forces against Communist China would: (a) increase the risk of general hostilities in the Far East, including Soviet participation under cover of the existing Sino-Soviet agreements; (b) involve U.S. military forces in another Asiatic peripheral action, thus detracting from U.S. capabilities to conduct a global war in the near future; (c) arouse public opposition to "another Korea"; and (d) imply willingness to use U.S. military forces in other critical areas subject to communist aggression. Nevertheless, by failing to take action, the United States would permit the communists to obtain, at little or no cost, a victory of major world consequence.

30. Informed public opinion might support use of U.S. forces in Indochina regardless of sentiment against "another Korea" on the basis that: (a) Indochina is of far greater strategic importance than Korea; (b) the confirmation of UN willingness to oppose aggression with force, demonstrated at such a high cost in Korea, might be nullified by the failure to commit UN forces in Indochina; and (c) a second instance of aggression by the Chinese Communists would justify measures not subject to the limitations imposed upon the UN action in Korea.

31. The military action contemplated herein would constitute, in effect, a war against Communist China which would be limited only as to its objectives, but would not be subject to any geographic limitations. Employment of U.S. forces in a de facto war without a formal declaration would raise questions which would make it desirable to consult with key members of both parties in Congress in order to obtain their prior concurrence in the courses of action contemplated.

July 14, 1952

MINISTERIAL TALKS IN LONDON, JUNE 1952Summary Minutes^{1/}3:00 - 4:30 P.M., Thursday, June 26, 1952
British Foreign OfficeEXTRACT

MR. EDEN opened the conversation on Indo-China by stating that it might be well, during the bilateral discussions, to go over together what could be said to Mr. Schuman in the trilateral discussions. He anticipated that Mr. Schuman might take the by now familiar line that there was little prospect for victory in Indo-China and that, unless a general settlement were reached, the best we could hope for would be a stalemate. This did not accord to the understanding of the British Government, which has the impression that the situation is improving somewhat; certainly there is a better government, there is wider representation in the government, and active Vietnamese participation. MR. EDEN said that he planned to discuss the situation with Mr. Schuman along such lines in the hope of stimulating his morale and divorcing him from his relatively defeatist attitude. THE SECRETARY replied that he had been discussing Indo-China with the French along the lines he and Mr. Eden had taken in the tripartite discussions in Paris. He expressed the opinion that the only avenue to success in Indo-China is the rapid build-up of native armed forces and the assumption by the people of Vietnam of an

increasing

^{1/} Copy held in S/S-R. The June 26 discussions are also described in tel. SECTO 19, June 27, 1952, from London.

increasing share of the financial and military burden. THE SECRETARY announced that the French had been informed that the United States was prepared to increase its military assistance program for Indo-China by \$150 million. He added that the United States, feeling that the French military training program was badly strained, had offered to assist them in this respect, but that the French, always skittish over what they might regard as undue American interference, had not taken up this offer. Certainly it is not up to the Americans to press on the French assistance along these lines. THE SECRETARY said that it was obvious that Mr. Letourneau was much encouraged as a result of his visit to Washington. He asked Dr. Jessup to read the text of the Department's telegram 2014, June 18, to Saigon, summarizing the discussions with Mr. Letourneau.

THE SECRETARY said that he had warned the French that success in the military field in Indo-China carried with it certain dangers, including the increased possibility of a large-scale Chinese Communist military intervention. He said that this in turn points up the question, "How can we prevent this from happening?" He felt it would be desirable to issue a warning statement of some sort, whether public, private, detailed and specific, or otherwise, but it would be essential to have a general understanding as to the action which we might take if the warning were to go unheeded. To issue a warning and take no effective action would be calamitous. Perhaps the United States and the United Kingdom, preferably in conjunction with France, Australia, and New Zealand, can reach a tentative agreement on political policy in this regard which would form a framework for joint military planning. This, in turn, leads to the major question: "What form could retaliation against aggression take?" The American military authorities are of the strong opinion that action only against the approaches to Indo-China would be ineffective. In fact, the first problem which we would likely have to face would be the evacuation of French military and civilians from Tongking. Action confined to the air and naval arms directed against the Chinese Communists in Indo-China would likewise be ineffective and, in the light of world commitments, the United States has no infantry available for operations within

within Indo-China. The United States thinking is along the lines of a blockade of the coast of China, combined with air action, designed to upset the economy of mainland China and to lessen the will of the Chinese Communists to continue their aggression. Such action would cease when aggression ceased, and this would be made clear to everyone. Every effort should be made to avoid action in the areas of acute sensitivity to the Soviet Union. We are of the opinion that the Soviet Union would probably not enter the conflict if it understood clearly that we had no intention of attempting to overthrow the Chinese Communist regime by force. We must bear in mind that the Chinese Communists have a formidable air force, and we may be forced to attack it wherever it is found. If the Chinese Communists do invade Indo-China in substantial force, it will be a threat to the vital interests of all of us.

Mr. EDEN said that he saw no serious objection to the issuance of a warning; he recalled that he had already issued a public warning in his speech at Columbia University. He felt that, whether or not a warning is issued, it would be important to have the Chinese Communists know that retaliation against further Chinese aggression is being urgently considered.

THE SECRETARY reiterated that there was an urgent need for basic political guidance on the basis of which military talks could proceed. Mr. EDEN said that he would wish to consult the Cabinet on basic policy, noting that a naval blockade involving Hong Kong was a serious question.

There was general agreement that the Secretary and Mr. Eden would conduct their discussions with Mr. Schuman along the above lines.

June 25, 1952

NSC 124/2

NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

to the

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

UNITED STATES OBJECTIVES AND COURSES
OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

- References:
- A. NSC 124/1
 - B. NSC 124 and Annex to NSC 124
 - C. NSC Action Nos. 597, 614 and 655
 - D. Memos for NSC from Executive Secretary, same subject, dated June 24 and June 25, 1952
 - E. Memos for NSC from Executive Secretary, subject, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia," dated March 4, April 15, April 30 and May 21, 1952
 - F. NSC 48/5
 - G. NSC 64
 - H. SE-22 and SE-27

At the 120th Council meeting with the President presiding, the National Security Council and the Acting Secretary of the Treasury adopted NSC 124/1, subject to changes in paragraphs 2-a, 3, 5, 10-c-(2), 10-c-(3), 11-(1), 11-(3), and 12 thereof, as incorporated in the enclosure (NSC Action No. 655).

In adopting NSC 124/1, as amended, the Council and the Acting Secretary of the Treasury noted the following statement by the Acting Secretary of Defense with respect to the views of the Joint Secretaries regarding NSC 124/1:

"In our opinion, if this policy is to be truly effective, it must be clearly recognized that the U. S. policy 'to make it possible for the French to reduce the degree of their participation in the military, economic and political affairs of the Associated States' (par. 8-d) must be emphasized and reemphasized to the French at each and every political, economic or military negotiation which the U. S. Government enters into with the Government of France, especially those

negotiations which deal with the providing of U. S. economic or military aid to France or to Indochina."

The report, as amended and adopted, was subsequently submitted to the President for consideration. The President has this date approved NSC 124/1, as amended and enclosed herewith, and directs its implementation by all appropriate executive departments and agencies of the U. S. Government under the coordination of the Secretaries of State and Defense.

Accordingly, NSC 64 and paragraph 14 of NSC 48/5 are superseded by the enclosed report. The enclosure does not supersede, but supplements the statement of the current objective with respect to Southeast Asia contained in paragraph 6-g of NSC 48/5.

It is requested that special security precautions be observed in the handling of the enclosure, and that access to it be restricted on a need-to-know basis.

JAMES S. LAY, Jr.
Executive Secretary

cc: The Secretary of the Treasury.
The Acting Director of Defense Mobilization

STATEMENT OF POLICY
by the
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

UNITED STATES OBJECTIVES AND COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT
TO SOUTHEAST ASIA*

OBJECTIVE

1. To prevent the countries of Southeast Asia from passing into the communist orbit, and to assist them to develop the will and ability to resist communism from within and without and to contribute to the strengthening of the free world.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

2. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.

a. The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with communism of the rest of

*Southeast Asia is used herein to mean the area embracing Burma, Thailand, Indochina, Malaya and Indonesia.

Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow. Such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.

b. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the U. S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U. S. security interests in the Far East.

c. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and India, all important areas of free Asia.

d. The loss of Southeast Asia, especially of Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to communism.

3. It is therefore imperative that an overt attack on Southeast Asia by the Chinese Communists be vigorously opposed. In order to pursue the military courses of action envisaged in this paper to a favorable conclusion within a reasonable period, it will be necessary to divert military strength from

other areas thus reducing our military capability in those areas, with the recognized increased risks involved therein, or to increase our military forces in being, or both.

4. The danger of an overt military attack against Southeast Asia is inherent in the existence of a hostile and aggressive Communist China, but such an attack is less probable than continued communist efforts to achieve domination through subversion. The primary threat to Southeast Asia accordingly arises from the possibility that the situation in Indochina may deteriorate as a result of the weakening of the resolve of, or as a result of the inability of the governments of France and of the Associated States to continue to oppose the Viet Minh rebellion, the military strength of which is being steadily increased by virtue of aid furnished by the Chinese Communist regime and its allies.

5. The successful defense of Tonkin is critical to the retention in non-Communist hands of mainland Southeast Asia. However, should Burma come under communist domination, a communist military advance through Thailand might make Indochina, including Tonkin, militarily indefensible. The execution of the following U. S. courses of action with respect to individual countries of the area may vary depending upon the route of communist advance into Southeast Asia.

6. Actions designed to achieve our objectives in Southeast Asia require sensitive selection and application, on the

one hand to assure the optimum efficiency through coordination of measures for the general area, and on the other, to accommodate to the greatest practicable extent to the individual sensibilities of the several governments, social classes and minorities of the area.

Southeast Asia

7. With respect to Southeast Asia, the United States should:

a. Strengthen propaganda and cultural activities, as appropriate, in relation to the area to foster increased alignment of the people with the free world.

b. Continue, as appropriate, programs of economic and technical assistance designed to strengthen the indigenous non-communist governments of the area.

c. Encourage the countries of Southeast Asia to restore and expand their commerce with each other and with the rest of the free world, and stimulate the flow of the raw material resources of the area to the free world.

d. Seek agreement with other nations, including at least France, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, for a joint warning to Communist China regarding the grave consequences of Chinese aggression against Southeast Asia, the issuance of such a warning to be contingent upon the prior agreement of France and the UK to participate in the courses of action set forth in paragraphs 10 c, 12, 14 f (1) and (2), and 15 e (1) and (2), and such others as are determined as a result of prior tri-lateral consultation, in the event such a warning is ignored.

e. Seek UK and French agreement in principle that a naval blockade of Communist China should be included in the minimum courses of action set forth in paragraph 10c below.

f. Continue to encourage and support closer cooperation among the countries of Southeast Asia, and between those countries and the United States, Great Britain, France, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia and Japan.

g. Strengthen, as appropriate, covert operations designed to assist in the achievement of U. S. objectives in Southeast Asia.

h. Continue activities and operations designed to encourage the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia to organize and activate anti-communist groups and activities within their own communities, to resist the effects of parallel pro-communist groups and activities and, generally, to increase their orientation toward the free world.

i. Take measures to promote the coordinated defense of the area, and encourage and support the spirit of resistance among the peoples of Southeast Asia to Chinese Communist aggression and to the encroachments of local communists.

j. Make clear to the American people the importance of Southeast Asia to the security of the United States so that they may be prepared for any of the courses of action proposed herein.

Indochina

8. With respect to Indochina the United States should:

a. Continue to promote international support for the three Associated States.

b. Continue to assure the French that the U.S. regards the French effort in Indochina as one of great strategic importance in the general international interest rather than in the purely French interest, and as essential to the security of the free world, not only in the Far East but in the Middle East and Europe as well. ✓

c. Continue to assure the French that we are cognizant of the sacrifices entailed for France in carrying out her effort in Indochina and that, without overlooking the principle that France has the primary responsibility in Indochina, we will recommend to the Congress appropriate military, economic and financial aid ✓ to France and the Associated States.

d. Continue to cultivate friendly and increasingly cooperative relations with the Governments of France and the Associated States at all levels with a view to maintaining and, if possible, increasing the degree of influence the U.S. can bring to bear on the policies and actions of the French and Indochinese authorities to the end of directing the course of events toward the objectives we seek. Our influence with the French and Associated

States should be designed to further those constructive political, economic and social measures which will tend to increase the stability of the Associated States and thus make it possible for the French to reduce the degree of their participation in the military, economic and political affairs of the Associated States.

e. Specifically we should use our influence with France and the Associated States to promote positive political, military, economic and social policies, among which the following are considered essential elements:

(1) Continued recognition and carrying out by France of its primary responsibility for the defense of Indochina.

(2) Further steps by France and the Associated States toward the evolutionary development of the Associated States.

(3) Such reorganization of French administration and representation in Indochina as will be conducive to an increased feeling of responsibility on the part of the Associated States.

(4) Intensive efforts to develop the armies of the Associated States, including independent logistical and administrative services.

(5) The development of more effective and stable Governments in the Associated States.

(6) Land reform, agrarian and industrial credit, ✓
sound rice marketing systems, labor development,
foreign trade and capital formation.

(7) An aggressive military, political, and ✓
psychological program to defeat or seriously reduce
the Viet Minh forces.

(8) US-French cooperation in publicizing pro-
gressive developments in the foregoing policies in
Indochina.

9. In the absence of large scale Chinese Communist inter-
vention in Indochina, the United States should:

a. Provide increased aid on a high priority basis
for the French Union forces without relieving French
authorities of their basic military responsibility for
the defense of the Associated States in order to:

(1) Assist in developing indigenous armed forces
which will eventually be capable of maintaining in-
ternal security without assistance from French units.

(2) Assist the French Union forces to maintain
progress in the restoration of internal security
against the Viet Minh.

(3) Assist the forces of France and the Associa-
ted States to defend Indochina against Chinese Com-
munist aggression.

b. In view of the immediate urgency of the situation,

involving possible large-scale Chinese Communist intervention, and in order that the United States may be prepared to take whatever action may be appropriate in such circumstances, make the plans necessary to carry out the courses of action indicated in paragraph 10 below.

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c. In the event that information and circumstances point to the conclusion that France is no longer prepared to carry the burden in Indochina, or if France presses for an increased sharing of the responsibility for Indochina, whether in the UN or directly with the U. S. Government, oppose a French withdrawal and consult with the French and British concerning further measures to be taken to safeguard the area from communist domination.

to 10. In the event that it is determined, in consultation with France, that Chinese Communist forces (including volunteers) have overtly intervened in the conflict in Indochina, or are covertly participating to such an extent as to jeopardize retention of the Tonkin Delta area by French Union forces, the United States should take the following measures to assist these forces in preventing the loss of Indochina, to repel the aggression and to restore peace and security in Indochina:

a. Support a request by France or the Associated States for immediate action by the United Nations which would include a UN resolution declaring that Communist China has committed an aggression, recommending that

member states take whatever action may be necessary, without geographic limitation, to assist France and the Associated States in meeting the aggression.

b. Whether or not UN action is immediately forthcoming, seek the maximum possible international support for, and participation in, the minimum courses of military action agreed upon by the parties to the joint warning. These minimum courses of action are set forth in subparagraph c immediately below.

c. Carry out the following minimum courses of military action, either under the auspices of the UN or in conjunction with France and the United Kingdom and any other friendly governments:

(1) A resolute defense of Indochina itself to which the United States would provide such air and naval assistance as might be practicable.

(2) Interdiction of Chinese Communist communication lines including those in China.

(3) The United States would expect to provide the major forces for task (2) above; but would expect the UK and France to provide at least token forces therefor and to render such other assistance as is normal between allies, and France to carry the burden of providing, in conjunction with the Associated States, the ground forces for the defense of Indochina.

11. In addition to the courses of action set forth in paragraph 10 above, the United States should take the following military actions as appropriate to the situation:

a. If agreement is reached pursuant to paragraph 7-e, establishment in conjunction with the UK and France of a naval blockade of Communist China.

b. Intensification of covert operations to aid anti-communist guerrilla forces operating against Communist China and to interfere with and disrupt Chinese Communist lines of communication and military supply areas.

c. Utilization, as desirable and feasible, of anti-communist Chinese forces, including Chinese Nationalist forces in military operations in Southeast Asia, Korea, or China proper.

d. Assistance to the British to cover an evacuation from Hong Kong, if required.

e. Evacuation of French Union civil and military personnel from the Tonkin delta, if required.

12. If, subsequent to aggression against Indochina and execution of the minimum necessary courses of action listed in paragraph 10-c above, the United States determines jointly with the UK and France that expanded military action against Communist China is rendered necessary by the situation,

the United States should take air and naval action in conjunction with at least France and the U.K. against all suitable military targets in China, avoiding insofar as practicable those targets in areas near the boundaries of the USSR in order not to increase the risk of direct Soviet involvement.

13. In the event the concurrence of the United Kingdom and France to expanded military action against Communist China is not obtained, the United States should consider taking unilateral action.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE SECRETARY

June 17, 1952

Following his telephone conversation with Sir Oliver Franks today, which is reported separately, the Secretary saw General Bradley and Mr. Perkins. Later Sir Oliver dropped in at the office following a meeting in Mr. Jessup's office. He asked if he could see the Secretary for a few minutes to get the further report on the matter of talks on Southeast Asia. He repeated what he told us earlier that he had had a second message from London following the report which the Embassy had sent of Mr. Perkins' conversation with Mr. Steele.

The Secretary said that he had talked about this matter with General Bradley this afternoon and that Friday was the only day which General Bradley could possibly meet and that was very inconvenient for Mr. Acheson. He said, therefore, he thought that any talks were impossible to arrange. He then said that he would be glad to talk to Sir Oliver right at that moment and see where we stood.

The Secretary reviewed the situation and the talks which took place in Paris. He said that in the earlier meetings which had taken place on Southeast Asia, everyone had started from a different point and there had been little in the way of conclusion reached. He said that he felt what was needed now was political decisions.

The Secretary then analyzed the situation as we saw it. He said that if the Chinese came into Indochina in force, we would have to do something. We could not remain passive. He said that none of the things we could do were very pleasant ones and we felt that a warning was highly desirable. He said that we felt we should not give a warning, however, if there had been no agreement on what we did in the event the Communists moved in anyway. He said this would make us look very silly and would weaken the effect of any other warnings.

He said it was clear that it was futile and a mistake to defend Indochina in Indochina. He said we could not have another Korea. He said it was also true we could not put ground forces in Indochina. We do not have them and we could not afford to immobilize such forces as we had. He said we could take air and naval action, however, and had discussed whether this should be confined to approaches.

He concluded that our only hope was of changing the Chinese mind. He said that we could strike where it hurts China or we could set up a blockade against trade. He said we had concluded that our mission would not be to destroy the Communist regime. He also said that we fully realized the danger of bringing the USSR into the show.

The Secretary concluded that there was no point in getting our military people into any talks. He said we must get political decisions first. He said that if firm decisions could not be reached that we perhaps could reach tentative decisions. He said that it had been clear at Paris that he was somewhat "ahead of the play" while the French and the British had urged us to discuss these matters and had wanted discussions before decisions were made. When the question actually came up, they were not ready to talk.

The Secretary remarked that Mr. Letourneau had said in Paris that the military talks had reached some decision as to how to evacuate the wounded, etc., in the event of difficulties. He said that our Navy had talked to Mr. Letourneau regarding port sizes, capacity of ships, etc., with regard to evacuation.

Sir Oliver said he thought he understood the point, would report back to London and would let us know if there were anything further on it.

Mr. Acheson said that if his analysis were wrong and the British Chiefs of Staff had any different one, he would be glad to hear of it.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

JUNE 18, 1952

NO. 473

Secretary Acheson made the following statement at his news conference today:

VISIT OF M. JEAN LETOURNEAU

As you are aware, M. Jean Letourneau, Minister of the Associated States for the French Government, has been spending the last few days in Washington exchanging views with representatives of various agencies of this Government. The Ambassadors of Cambodia and Vietnam have also participated in conversations with M. Letourneau and with our own representatives.

A communique covering the substance of the talks will be issued later today and I will therefore not go into details now. Yet I would like to share with you the feeling of encouragement and confidence which M. Letourneau inspires. His thorough grasp of the situation and his constructive approach to the problems involved - military, political and economic - have impressed us all.

As you know, the Communist aggression in Indochina has been going on for six years. It has been greatly stepped up because of assistance received from Communist China during the past two years. Yet, under French leadership, the threat to this part of the free world has been met with great courage and admirable resourcefulness. The military situation appears to be developing favorably. It has been good to hear from M. Letourneau of the part played in achieving this result by the considerable quantities of American arms and material which the magnificent fighting qualities of the French Union forces, including those of the Associated States, have justified us in devoting to this area of the struggle against Communist aggression. The effort to make of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia secure and prosperous members of the free world community has made great progress.

I have been particularly impressed by what M. Letourneau has told me of what is being done to enable the people of the three Associated States to play the constantly greater role in their own defense to which they rightly aspire. Much has been accomplished toward the creation, training and equipping of the national armies. Units of these armies have distinguished themselves

in battle and are performing vital security functions in many parts of the country. They look forward with confidence and determination to assuming an increasing share of the burden of carrying on the struggle. Their effectiveness full justifies the program of expansion to which the governments concerned are committed and underlines, I believe, the soundness of our own decision, . . . subject of course to the availability of Congressional appropriations, to render increasing assistance in building these armies. M. Letourneau described these programs in the course of his address before the Overseas Writers yesterday.

Favorable developments have not been confined to the fighting fronts and to the national armies. There are increasing evidences of the growing vitality of the Associated States in handling their political, financial and economic affairs. M. Letourneau's account of the manner in which these new member States of the French Union are envisaging and meeting their responsibilities was heartening. I do not think it is generally realized to what extent these new states in fact control their own affairs. Only a limited number of services related to the necessities of the war remain temporarily in French hands.

We in the United States are aware of the vital importance of the struggle in Indochina to the cause of the free world. We have earmarked for Indochina economic and materiel aid to a considerable amount during the past two years. We are doing our best to activate deliveries: as you are aware the 150th ship bearing American arms and munitions to Indochina arrived in Saigon within the last few weeks. We are now bearing a considerable portion of the total burden of the war in Indochina expressed in financial terms, although of course the entire combat burden is being carried by the French Union and the Associated States with the latter assuming a constantly increasing share.

The Communists have made a most determined effort in Indochina. Their aggression has been checked and recent indications warrant the view that the tide is now moving in our favor. Once again the policy of meeting aggression with force is paying off and we can I believe be confident that as we carry out the plans upon which we have agreed we can anticipate continued favorable developments in the maintenance and consolidation of the free world bulwark in Indochina.

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON

COPY NO. 1

August 5, 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT: Further United States Support for France
and the Associated States of Indochina

REFERENCES: A. NSC 124/2
B. NSC Action Nos. 758, 773 and 780
C. NIE-63 and NIE-91

The enclosed report by the Department of State on the subject is transmitted herewith for consideration by the National Security Council of the recommendation contained in paragraph 9 thereof at its meeting on Thursday, August 6, 1953.

James S. Lay, Jr.
JAMES S. LAY, Jr.
Executive Secretary

cc: The Secretary of the Treasury
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Director of Central Intelligence

The winding up of the Indochina war is a necessary condition to enable France to check both these trends and reassume a more confident and positive role on the continent.

4. The lack of success so far in Indochina is traceable largely to French failure:

a. by timely grants of sovereignty and impressive military success, to win a sufficient native support to permit more rapid development of larger and more effective native armies, and to frustrate nationalist appeal of the Viet Minh.

b. to plan and execute aggressive military operations.

5. The present French government is the first in seven years which seems prepared to do what needs to be done to wind up the war in Indochina. Its plans offer the United States at last an opportunity to attack the major Indochinese and Metropolitan French problems as a whole. The French Premier has assured our representatives that his government is anxious to continue the struggle and to press on to win, but he can carry through his program against political opposition only if he offers a "package" solution, not only of Indochina but of the related French weakness in Europe and at home. For this purpose the new government has developed the following program:

a. Military Initiative. A new commander, General Navarre, has taken over in Indochina and is determined to assume the offensive. The initial operations under his command testify to this resolve. He has revised the plan originally presented in outline to us by M. Letourneau in March 1953 for breaking the back of Viet Minh resistance during the campaign season of 1954-55. His plans include an increase in the native armies by approximately the following figures: 59,600 in 1953; 76,000 in 1954, and 20,000 in 1955 for a total of 331,650 by January 1956. At his request, the French government is prepared, despite popular opposition, to send nine more regular infantry battalions plus ancillary units from France, if the rest of the program is agreed on. The Navarre operational plans drawn up on Indochina were approved by Lt. Gen. O'Daniel, USA, in his report on his recent mission.

b. Political Program. Pursuant to the French declaration of July 3, M. Laniel has assured U. S. representatives of his determination to grant genuine independence to the Associated States without the strings which have marked the previous grants of "independence". He apparently envisages something very much like Dominion status, retaining only such French authority and privileges as may be agreed.

c. Fiscal Rehabilitation. Laniel conceives his project for Indochina as an integral part of a new and supreme effort by France to "put its house in order". He plans to approach a balanced budget during CY 1954. This will involve a cut in French military as well as civil expense for that year. At the same time he contemplates a greater effort in Indochina. To do this he asks the U. S. for additional assistance amounting to about \$400 million for FY 1954.

6. a. Attached are two tables showing (1) the financing of the Indochina war in CY 1953 and as proposed for CY 1954; and (2) U. S. aid for France and Indochina under 1953 program and 1954 appropriations. They contain tentative figures for 1954.

b. As the first table makes clear, under the proposed program, the United States would assume about 50 per cent of the 1954 budgetary expenditures (\$829 million out of \$1,676 million) and, if end-item aid is included, would be carrying about 61 per cent of the total financing. This would represent about two and one-third times the amount of U. S. aid for CY 1953.

c. As shown by the second table, this program would entail an increase of \$403 million over the assistance now planned for France (\$1,286 million). Of the total French military budget for both Indochina and NATO, the presently planned U. S. aid, including end items, would be 26 per cent; if the aid were increased as requested, such U. S. assistance, including end items, would be 34 per cent of the total.

d. Finally, as the first table indicates, under the program, the total expenditures for Indochina for 1954, including end items, would be \$2,160 million as compared with \$1,700 for CY 1953.

7. The program presents substantial risks. Under it, the French build-up in Europe would be slowed down in some degree, both by the limited troop diversion and the cut in the French military budget. Moreover, in the best of circumstances, the Indo-Chinese war cannot be successfully closed out before the 1954-55 fighting season. Consequently, in addition to any supplemental aid furnished now, we would have to contemplate a comparable further contribution a year from now to assure a satisfactory conclusion. Furthermore, there is the risk that the French Union forces in Indo-China might suffer reverses before the projected additional effort can be brought to bear.

8. Despite these risks and uncertainties it is believed that the U. S. should agree, in its own security interests, to furnish the additional \$400 million of aid to France. Various factors lead to this conclusion:

a. The Laniel government is almost certainly the last French government which would undertake to continue the war in Indo-China. If it fails, it will almost certainly be succeeded by a government committed to seek a settlement on terms dangerous to the security of the U. S. and the Free World. The negotiation of a truce in Korea, added to the frustrations and weariness of the seven years' war, has markedly increased the sentiment in France for some kind of negotiated peace in Indo-China. In the recent protracted French governmental crisis, every leading candidate bid for popular support with some kind of promise to reduce the Indo-China commitment in some way. For the first time in seven years, latent defeatist impulses emerged into real efforts by political and parliamentary leaders to "pull out".

b. Under present conditions any negotiated settlement would mean the eventual loss to Communism not only of Indo-China but of the whole of Southeast Asia.

c. The loss of Indo-China would be critical to the security of the U. S. Communist control of Indo-China would endanger vital raw material sources; it would weaken the confidence of other Southeast Asian states in Western leadership; it would make more difficult and more expensive the defense of Japan, Formosa and the Philippines; and complicate the creation of viable Japanese economy. If the French actually decided to withdraw, the U. S. would have to consider most seriously whether to take over in this area.

d. On the other hand, if the proposed program does succeed, and the French are able to achieve victory in Indo-

China within two years, the effect will be to strengthen the Free World and our coalition in Europe as well as Southeast Asia. France will be enabled to adopt in Europe the active role which her weakness has undermined in the preceding period.

Recommendation

9. Accordingly it is recommended that the National Security Council agree to an increase in aid to France in the current fiscal year by an amount not exceeding \$400 million above that already committed, provided only that (a) the Joint Chiefs of Staff inform the National Security Council that in their view the French plan holds the promise of military success; and (b) the Director of the Foreign Operations Administration ascertain the available sources within currently appropriated funds and, the extent to which a special supplementary appropriation will be necessary when Congress reconvenes in January 1954.

TAB A

FINANCING THE WAR IN INDOCHINA
(millions of dollars)

	<u>1953</u>	<u>1954</u>
<u>Present estimate of requirements</u>		
French Expeditionary Corps	866	866
Reinforcements under Navarre plan	0	54
French Air Force and Navy	<u>137</u>	<u>137</u>
Total French forces	1003	1057
Associated States forces		
Regular Armies	335	400
Light battalions and support troops	43	196
Air and naval forces	<u>9</u>	<u>23</u>
Total	387	619
Total budgetary requirement	<u>1390</u>	<u>1676</u>
<u>Financing of requirements</u>		
French budget or equivalent		
French fiscal resources	975	690
U. S. financial assistance		
Presently available	258	426
Requirement yet to be financed	<u>0</u>	<u>403</u>
Total	258	829
Total French budget or equivalent including U. S. financial assistance	<u>1233</u>	<u>1519</u>
Associated States fiscal resources	<u>157</u>	<u>157</u>
Total budgetary resources	1390	1676
<u>Total U. S. aid for Indochina</u>		
Financial assistance (as above)	258	829
Military end-item program	255	429
Common-use program	30	30
Economic aid to Associated States	<u>25</u>	<u>25</u>
Total	568	1313
<u>Total financing by France, Associated States and the U. S.</u>		
Budgetary	1390	1676
Other	<u>310</u>	<u>484</u>
Total	1700	2160
<u>Total U. S. financing as percent of total program</u>	33%	61%

NOTE: U. S. fiscal year 1954 aid program is related to French calendar year 1954 budget program.

TAB B

U. S. AID TO FRANCE AND INDOCHINA
(millions of dollars)

	<u>Program</u> <u>1953</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>1954</u>	<u>Appropriated</u> <u>1954</u>
I. <u>Aid related to April memorandum*</u>			
Mutual defense financing			
Attributed French NATO budget	169	100	85
Attributed Indochina budget	<u>48</u>	<u>400</u>	<u>400</u>
Total	217	500	485
Defense support assistance			
Attributed French NATO budget	158	0	0
Attributed Indochina budget	<u>210^a</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	368	0	0
"Kitty" to cover partial costs of expansion Indochina forces	0	100	26 ^b
Total aid related to April memorandum	<u>585</u>	<u>600</u>	<u>511</u>
II. <u>Unmet request for aid to finance proposed Indochina program</u>			829
Total U. S. aid now available for Indochina in relation to April memorandum			<u>426</u>
Requirement yet to be financed.			403

*Memorandum on aid prepared by U. S. delegation to the North Atlantic Council meeting in Paris and handed to the French Government by the U. S. delegation on April 26, 1953.

TAB B (Cont'd)

	<u>Program 1953</u>	<u>Proposed 1954</u>	<u>Appropriated 1954</u>
III. <u>U. S. aid in addition to April memorandum</u>			
Military end-item program: France	0 ^d	364	291 ^c
Military end-item program: Indochina	255	429	429
Common-use program for Indochina	30	30	30
Economic aid to Associated States	25	25	25
Total	<u>310</u>	<u>848</u>	<u>775</u>
IV. <u>Total U. S. aid for France and Indochina</u>			
Presently available funds	895	1448	1286
Requirement yet to be financed			403
Total			<u>1689</u>
V. <u>Total military program of France and the Associated States, including U. S. assistance in all forms French military budget</u>			
NATO and other areas	2730		2444
Indochina			
Present French budget plan	1233		1090
Additional U. S. financing requested	0		429
Total	<u>1233</u>		<u>1519</u>
Total French budget with U. S. support	<u>3963</u>		<u>3963</u>
Associated States military budgets	157		157
U. S. aid outside April memorandum	310		775
Total program with U. S. aid	<u>4430</u>		<u>4895</u>

TAB B (Cont'd)

	Program <u>1953</u>	Proposed <u>1954</u>	Appropriated <u>1954</u>
VI. <u>Total U. S. aid as</u> <u>percent total programs</u> <u>financed by U. S.</u> <u>France and Associated</u> <u>States</u>			
Presently available funds	20%		26%
Including requirement yet to be financed			34%

NOTES:

U. S. fiscal 1954 aid program is related to French calendar 1954 budget program.

- a. Figure arbitrary since attribution has not yet taken place: figure based upon 1952 experience, and also includes counterpart of \$60 million provided out of fiscal 1953 appropriation, under April memorandum.
- b. Available from unprogrammed portion of carry-over into fiscal 1954 of unobligated fiscal 1953 appropriations for Far East military aid.
- c. Arbitrarily reduced 20 percent to reflect proportionate reduction in European military aid appropriation below figures proposed to Congress.
- d. This figure shown as zero because of reprogramming which took place in course of the year, because of over-programming for France for the period FY 1950-1953; in effect, no net additional funds were therefore necessary for the French end-item program out of the 1953 appropriations.

28 August 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ✓

Subject: The Navarre Concept for Operations
in Indochina.

1. In a memorandum for you, dated 21 April 1953, subject: "Proposed French Strategic Plan for the Successful Conclusion of the War in Indochina," the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out certain weaknesses in the LeTourneau-Allard plan, but felt that it was workable. During the visit of the U.S. Joint Military Mission to Indochina, Lieutenant General Navarre submitted in writing to Lieutenant General O'Daniel, Chief of the Mission, a paper entitled "Principles for the Conduct of the War in Indochina" appended hereto, which appears to correct these weaknesses and which presents a marked improvement in French military thinking concerning operations in Indochina.

2. In his report Lieutenant General O'Daniel stated that, in his opinion, the new French command in Indochina will accomplish under the Navarre concept the decisive defeat of the Viet Minh by 1955 and that the addition of two or more French divisions from outside of Indochina would expedite this defeat. Additions other than in divisional organization would be in error since it is the divisional team, with its combat proven effectiveness, which is sorely needed in Indochina. Lieutenant General O'Daniel further reported that French military leaders were most cooperative with the mission, that several agreements were accomplished to improve the effectiveness of the proposed military operations, and that repeated invitations were extended to the U.S. mission to return in a few months to witness the progress the French will have made.

3. Based on past performances by the French, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reservations in predicting actual results which can be expected pending additional proof by demonstration of continued French support and by further French performance in Indochina. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that a basic requirement for military success in Indochina is one of creating a political climate in that country which will provide the incentive for natives to support the French and supply

them with adequate intelligence which is vital to the successful conduct of operations in Indochina. If this is accomplished and if the Navarre concept is vigorously pursued militarily in Indochina and given wholehearted political support in France, it does offer a promise of military success sufficient to warrant appropriate additional U.S. aid required to assist. U.S. support of the Navarre concept should be based on needs of the French Union Forces in Indochina for additional equipment necessary to implement the organization of the "Battle Corps" envisaged by the Navarre concept and necessary support of the planned expansion of indigenous forces, such needs to be screened by the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Indochina. In addition, to improve the chances of success, this support should include continued close liaison and coordination with French military authorities together with friendly but firm encouragement and advice where indicated.

4. In furtherance of the O'Daniel Mission the Joint Chiefs of Staff are receiving Progress Reports from Indochina. Information received from Indochina indicates the French are not pursuing agreements reached between General O'Daniel and General Navarre (including the Navarre Concept) as vigorously as expected by General O'Daniel and as contemplated by him in his report. Progress reports state that (a) the French have "no plans for a general fall offensive beyond limited objective operations designed to keep the enemy off balance", (b) reorganization into regiments and division-size units "is still in the planning stages", (c) there is "no sense of urgency in the training of senior Vietnamese commanders and staff officers", (d) the organization of a training command is awaiting the solution of "political problems" and (e) the "organization of the amphibious plan has not gone beyond the planning stages".

5. In light of the apparent slowness of the French in following up the Navarre Concept and other agreements reached between General Navarre and General O'Daniel, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that additional U.S. support should be conditioned upon continued implementation of French support, demonstration of French intent by actual performance in Indochina, and continued French willingness to receive and act upon U.S. military advice. Further, the French should be urged at all levels to support and vigorously prosecute the Navarre concept to the maximum extent of their capabilities.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

ARTHUR RADFORD,
Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff.

PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA THROUGH MID-1954

THE PROBLEM

To estimate French Union and Communist capabilities and probable courses of action with respect to Indochina and the internal situation throughout Indochina through mid-1954.

ASSUMPTION

There is no major expansion of the Korean war.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Unless there is a marked improvement in the French Union military position in Indochina, political stability in the Associated States and popular support of the French Union effort against the Viet Minh will decline. We believe that such marked improvement in the military situation is not likely, though a moderate improvement is possible. The over-all French Union position in Indochina therefore will probably deteriorate during the period of this estimate.
2. The lack of French Union military successes, continuing Indochinese distrust of ultimate French political intentions, and popular apathy will probably continue to prevent a significant increase in Indochinese will and ability to resist the Viet Minh.
3. We cannot estimate the impact of the new French military leadership. However, we believe that the Viet Minh will retain the military initiative and will continue to attack territory in the Tonkin delta and to make incursions into areas outside the delta. The Viet Minh will attempt to consolidate Communist control in "Free Laos" and will build up supplies in northern Laos to support further penetrations and consolidation in that country. The Viet Minh will almost certainly intensify political warfare, including guerrilla activities, in Cambodia.
4. Viet Minh prestige has been increased by the military successes of the past year, and the organizational and administrative effectiveness of the regime will probably continue to grow.
5. The French Government will remain under strong and increasing domestic pressure to reduce the French military commitment in Indochina, and the possibility cannot be excluded that this pressure will be successful. However, we be-

lieve that the French will continue without enthusiasm to maintain their present levels of troop strength through mid-1954 and will support the planned development of the national armies of the Associated States.

6. We believe that the Chinese Communists will continue and possibly increase their present support of the Viet Minh. However, we believe that whether or not hostilities are concluded in Korea, the Chinese Communists will not invade Indochina during this period.¹ The Chinese Communists will almost certainly retain the capability to intervene so forcefully in Indochina as to overrun most of the Tonkin delta area before ef-

fective assistance could be brought to bear.

7. We believe that the Communist objective to secure control of all Indochina will not be altered by an armistice in Korea or by Communist "peace" tactics. However, the Communists may decide that "peace" maneuvers in Indochina would contribute to the attainment of Communist global objectives, and to the objective of the Viet Minh.

8. If present trends in the Indochinese situation continue through mid-1954, the French Union political and military position may subsequently deteriorate very rapidly.

DISCUSSION

THE CURRENT SITUATION

9. *Military Situation.*² The Viet Minh occupation of the mountainous Thai country of northwestern Tonkin in late 1952 and the follow-up thrust into northern Laos in April 1953 demonstrate that the Viet Minh have retained the military initiative in Indochina. Although the Viet Minh did not defeat any large French Union forces in these operations, they did force the French to withdraw the bulk of their offensive striking power from the Tonkin delta and disperse it in isolated strong points, dependent on air transport for logistic support. At the same time, strong Viet Minh guerrilla elements plus two regular

Viet Minh divisions sufficed to contain the 114,000 regular French Union forces remaining in the Tonkin delta. The Viet Minh now appear to have withdrawn the bulk of their regular forces from Laos. They probably have left behind political cadres, some regular forces, and well-supplied guerrilla units in the areas which they overran in order to consolidate Communist political and military control, to prepare bases for future operations, and to pin down French Union garrisons.

10. The invasion of Laos may have been undertaken as part of a long-range Communist design to develop unrest in Thailand and ultimately gain control of all Southeast Asia. Viewed solely in terms of the Viet Minh objective to win all of Indochina, however, the Viet Minh offensive in Laos is an extension of the 1952 winter's offensive in northwestern Tonkin, and represents a shift in Viet Minh military tactics. This shift in tactics is probably largely explained by the inability to defeat the main French Union forces in the Tonkin delta by direct assault. Faced with this position of strength, the Viet Minh began

¹The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believes that the intelligence available is insufficient to permit a conclusion at this time that the Chinese Communists will or will not invade Indochina prior to mid-1954.

²See Annex A for Estimated French Union Strengths and Dispositions;

See Annex B for Estimated Viet Minh Strengths and Dispositions;

See Annex C for French Far Eastern Air Force Strengths and Dispositions; and

See Annex D for French Far Eastern Naval Strengths and Dispositions.

during 1952 to turn the bulk of their regular forces toward the conquest of northwestern Tonkin and northern Laos, areas lightly held by isolated French Union garrisons.

11. In this manner, the Viet Minh probably hope to retain the military and political initiative and, by dispersing French Union forces, to prevent either a clean-up by the French Union in the Tonkin delta or offensive operations by the French Union against Viet Minh troop concentrations and supply installations outside the delta. The Viet Minh may well believe that by gradually extending their base areas in lightly defended regions of Laos, Cambodia, and central Vietnam they can keep French Union forces dispersed and pinned down indefinitely. In time, they probably expect to sap the morale of the Vietnamese and the French and finally so alter the balance of power as to make possible successful Viet Minh attacks against the key areas of Tonkin and south Vietnam.

12. The deployment of four divisions into Laos by the Viet Minh and the fact that the French did not attack their long and exposed lines of communication typify the over-all situation in Indochina. French Union forces still outweigh the Viet Minh in numbers, firepower, and materiel. French ability to air lift troops and equipment, although strained at the present time, provides the French Union with tactical flexibility in planning defensive and offensive operations. The Viet Minh, however, by their skill in guerrilla war, their ability to move rapidly and to infiltrate and control areas under nominal French occupation, have caused the French to commit large forces throughout Indochina to static defense, thus seriously reducing French ability to take the offensive.

13. Viet Minh regular forces in northern Indochina have continued their gradual evolution from lightly armed guerrilla bands to a regularly organized military force. They have made noticeable advances in the development of field communications, and unit firepower has increased although they still possess only limited amounts of artillery. Viet Minh combat effectiveness is still limited

by a lack of medical supplies and an inability to sustain major military operations.

14. Military aid from the US has enabled the French Union to equip adequately their regular ground forces. The French air forces, with US logistical support, and with no air opposition, have maintained a fair degree of effectiveness in paratroop operations, supply by air drops, and daylight attacks on enemy supply dumps. French naval forces have improved in combat effectiveness and have maintained control of the seacoasts and inland waterways. However, the Viet Minh have the continuing capability to threaten control of the inland waterways by a mining campaign. Some Vietnamese National Army units have performed creditably in combat, but desertion and "missing in action" figures remain high. For the most part, Vietnamese National Guard and other local security forces lack the firepower, discipline, and leadership to hold positions alone against regular Viet Minh units which infiltrate the Tonkin delta.

15. Although French Union military capabilities have improved slightly, the French Union military effort has been inhibited by considerations of domestic French politics, French security in Europe, and fear of involvement in a war with Communist China. These considerations have caused French commanders in Indochina to forego aggressive military operations that would entail heavy casualties and have prevented them from obtaining reinforcements on a scale that might make possible the defeat of the Viet Minh.

16. The development of the Vietnamese National Army, promised by the French in 1949, has been retarded by a shortage of officers and non-commissioned officers, by French lack of faith in the Vietnamese and by French fiscal problems. There has also been an unwillingness among many Vietnamese leaders, not including Premier Tam, to undertake a major mobilization effort until the French grant further political concessions and until the Vietnamese character of the new army is fully guaranteed.

17. *Political.* Some political progress has been made in Vietnam during the past year. Premier Tam's administration has enlisted the cooperation of the strongly nationalist Dai Viet leader Nguyen Huu Tri, and nationalist concern over Tam's francophilia has to some extent dissipated. Tam has also added to the political vitality of Vietnam by holding local elections in secure areas of Vietnam. Another Vietnamese program, undertaken with US economic assistance, which involves the relocation of scattered villages in the delta into centralized and defensible sites may be an important step toward the eventual "pacification" of heavily infiltrated areas. The decisions of March 1953 to increase the size of the Vietnamese National Army while expanding the area of Vietnamese strategic and operational responsibility, could also be of major political significance.

18. Despite these advances, Vietnam still lacks the degree of political strength essential for the mobilization of the country's resources. Tam's "action" program remains more shadow than substance. Elected local councils have no real power, promised land reform and other social and economic reforms which might generate popular support have not left the planning stage, and the Vietnamese government is handicapped by incompetent cabinet ministers and the lack of competent administrators. While Bao Dai refuses to assume active direction of the affairs of state, he remains hostile toward new leadership and democratic activities.

19. Of more basic importance in the failure of Vietnamese to rally to the Vietnamese government following the French grant of independence within the French Union in 1949 have been the following:

a. Many Vietnamese doubt the ability of French Union forces to defeat the Viet Minh and prefer to remain apart from the struggle.

b. The French Government has not dared to promise complete national independence at some future date, as demanded by the Vietnamese, because of the fear that the French national assembly would then refuse to support a war in a "lost" portion of the French Union.

c. The Vietnamese, despite many evolutionary steps toward complete independence since 1949, are generally inclined to believe that the French intend to retain effective control over the affairs of Vietnam.

d. The nationalist appeal and military prestige of the Viet Minh remains strong among significant numbers of the Vietnamese.

20. In Cambodia, internal political strife has weakened the government, dissident nationalist elements have continued to sap popular loyalty to the throne, and the King is demanding greater independence from the French in order to strengthen his political position at home. Meanwhile, the 9,000 Viet Minh combatants in Cambodia, while under fairly constant attack by French and Cambodian forces, are capable of exploiting disorders which may develop.

21. Laotian stability has been upset by the recent Viet Minh incursion. The Laotians are generally hostile to the Viet Minh but are unable to contribute a great deal to the defense of their homeland. A small group of pro-Communist Laotians returned to Laos with the Viet Minh during the recent incursion. It is led by a disaffected Laotian nobleman, Prince Souphanouvong, and calls itself the "Free Government of Pathet Lao" (Laos).

22. Meanwhile, the Viet Minh leadership, with Chinese Communist material and advisory assistance since 1949, has demonstrated the necessary zeal, ruthlessness, and tenacity to exploit to the maximum the limited resources at their command. The Viet Minh have expanded the area under their complete control and their prestige has probably increased throughout Indochina as a result of military successes in northwest Tonkin and Laos.

23. In the areas of Viet Minh occupation, Viet Minh control is believed to be effective, and minimum food requirements are being met. The Viet Minh have taken on increasingly the conventional characteristics of a "Peoples Republic" and are now engaged in programs to confiscate and redistribute land and to eliminate "traitors" and "reactionaries." Although this departure from national front tactics has increased realization

that the Viet Minh are under complete Communist domination, the Viet Minh control many villages within areas of nominal French Union occupation through terror, compulsion, and their continued nationalist appeal.

24. The Viet Minh and the Chinese Communists continue to maintain close relations. It is estimated that there are less than a thousand Chinese Communist advisers and technicians with the Viet Minh in Indochina. The Chinese Communists are providing the Viet Minh with military supplies at an estimated average level of 400 to 500 tons per month, and some Viet Minh troops are sent to Communist China for training. Small Chinese Communist units reportedly have entered the mountainous northwest section of Tonkin on several occasions to assist the Viet Minh against French-supported native guerrillas, but no Chinese Communist troops have been identified in forward areas. There was some evidence during the past year that Viet Minh policy statements may be "cleared," if not written, in Peiping. Close Viet Minh relations with Communist China are complemented, superficially at least, by equally warm relations with the Soviet Union, but we are unable to determine whether Peiping or Moscow has ultimate responsibility for Viet Minh policy.

PROBABLE TRENDS IN FRENCH UNION CAPABILITIES AND COURSES OF ACTION

25. French plans for dealing with the war in Indochina now revolve around the development of national armies in the Associated States, particularly in Vietnam. In March 1953, the Franco-Vietnamese High Military Council approved a new program calling for an increase in Vietnamese strength during the current year of 40,000 men, organized in 54 "commando" battalions.³ A further expansion of 57,000 men has been proposed for

³The 40,000 are to be recruited and will represent a net increase in French Union strength. Planned transfers of native units from the French Army to the Vietnamese Army will also strengthen the Vietnamese Army but will not represent any net increase in French Union strength.

1954 and will probably be undertaken if the initial reinforcement is successful and if equipment is made available by the US. With these additional Vietnamese forces, the French hope to undertake widespread clearing operations and subsequently to organize sufficient mobile groups to begin by early 1955 the destruction of the Viet Minh regular forces in Tonkin.

26. Progress has been made in carrying out the troop reinforcement program thus far, and the Vietnamese may have close to 40,000 reinforcements recruited, trained, and available for combat by early 1954. However, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos and the threat of similar operations will probably keep French mobile reserves deployed outside the Tonkin delta in isolated strong points. The addition of 40,000 untested and lightly armed Vietnamese will not offset the absence of these regular French forces, and effective clearing or offensive operations cannot be undertaken until French Union forces are regrouped. Moreover, the French military leadership has been so dominated by concepts of static defense as to be unable to conduct the planned operations with the vigor necessary for their success. How the new military leadership may alter this we cannot estimate. Finally, unless the French Union forces prove strong enough to provide security for the Vietnamese population, it will not be possible to sweep the guerrillas out of the areas as planned. Not only will the populace fail generally to provide the intelligence required to rout the guerrillas but, as in the past, they will frequently give warning of the presence of the French Union forces, thus permitting the guerrillas to take cover and later to emerge when the danger is past.

27. The French are fearful that they cannot achieve a military decision in Indochina. Unless the French Union military plans achieve great success during the period of this estimate, the conviction will grow in France that the Indochina problem can only be solved through some over-all East-West settlement in the Far East. The difficulties of the French financial position impel the French to seek relief from the mounting costs

of the Indochina war, and French apprehensions concerning eventual German rearmament not only make them reluctant to increase the military establishment in Indochina but impel them to seek the early return of French troops to Europe. The French Government will therefore remain under strong and increasing domestic pressure to reduce its military commitment in Indochina. On the other hand, the French Government is under strong pressure to maintain its position in Indochina. There is still considerable sentiment against abandoning the heavy investment which France has poured into Indochina. More important, there is great reluctance to accept the adverse effects on the cohesion of the French Union and on French prestige as a world power which would accompany the loss of France's position in Indochina. In these circumstances, we believe that the French will continue without enthusiasm to maintain their present levels of troop strength through mid-1954 and will support the planned development of the National Armies of the Associated States. At the same time, France will probably continue to seek maximum financial and material assistance for the French Union effort while resisting any measures which would impair French pre-eminence among the Associated States, including the making of any commitments concerning the eventual political status of the Associated States.

28. Political strength in Vietnam may grow slightly during 1953 as progress is made toward a stronger national army, as the Vietnamese assume increasing governmental responsibilities, and as Premier Tam's social and political programs serve to decrease distrust of French intentions. There will probably also be a growing understanding, and fear, of the true Communist nature and purpose of the Viet Minh. However, these developments will not bring about a significant increase in Vietnamese will and ability to resist the Viet Minh during the period of this estimate because the Vietnam leadership cannot in this brief period overcome popular apathy and mobilize the energy and resources of the people. Moreover, if events should

persuade Vietnam leaders that no progress toward national independence is possible under the French or that French Union forces cannot defeat the Viet Minh, it is probable that the political strength of Vietnam would decline rapidly. Substantial Viet Minh military victories in the Tonkin delta or elsewhere in Indochina would also produce such a decline.

29. In Cambodia, political stability is likely to decline as the result of tension between the monarchy, the politically divided people, and the French colonial administration. Even if French concessions to the King insure his adherence to the French Union, unrest in Cambodia or a Viet Minh penetration into southern Laos might force the deployment of strong French forces to Cambodia.

30. In Laos, political attitudes will be determined almost entirely by military developments. The Laotians will probably remain loyal to the French Union if they are defended aggressively. They will not, however, offer effective resistance to Communist efforts to consolidate political control if French Union forces retreat from the country or if the French Union forces defend only a few strong points.

PROBABLE TRENDS IN VIET MINH AND CHINESE COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES AND COURSES OF ACTION

31. *Viet Minh Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action.* Barring serious Viet Minh military reverses, which could occur if Viet Minh forces should overextend themselves or make frontal attacks on French Union strong points, the Viet Minh regime will probably increase its total strength slightly during the period of this estimate. Viet Minh prestige will be increased by their recent gains in Laos. The organizational and administrative effectiveness of the regime will probably continue to increase with experience and Chinese Communist guidance. The program of expropriation and distribution of lands to tenants now being carried out probably weakens the Viet Minh appeal among some classes, but will

probably strengthen Viet Minh controls at the village level and thus facilitate the collection of rice.

32. Militarily, the Viet Minh are unlikely to expand greatly their armed forces because they are already experiencing manpower difficulties. Their combat efficiency probably will increase, however, as the result of a modest augmentation of their unit firepower and a steady improvement in staff planning and coordination of forces. The Viet Minh probably will continue to receive a steady flow of material assistance from the Chinese Communists, and the amount may increase at any time. The Viet Minh do not have, and probably cannot develop within the period of this estimate, the capability to make such effective use of heavy equipment — artillery, armor, and aircraft — from the Chinese Communists as to permit successful attacks against strong concentrations of regular French forces. Over a longer period, however, a great increase in Viet Minh capabilities, including the development of an air force, is possible.

33. We believe that during the period of this estimate the Communists in Indochina will probably attempt to avoid combat except where they can achieve surprise or great superiority in numbers. They will attempt to consolidate Communist controls in "Free Laos" and will build up supplies in northern Laos to support further penetrations and consolidation in that country. If they reach the Thai border, they probably will attempt to organize guerrilla forces among the Vietnamese in northeastern Thailand, but we do not believe they will have the capability to provide much material assistance to such forces through mid-1954. The Viet Minh forces in Laos may hope to receive assistance from the Vietnamese population in Thailand. The Viet Minh will almost certainly intensify political warfare, including guerrilla activities in Cambodia.

34. We believe that neither the French Union nor the Viet Minh will be able to win a final military decision in Indochina through mid-1954. The Viet Minh, with their principal striking forces operating from the Tonkin base area, will probably retain the initiative

during the period of this estimate by maintaining attacks against lightly defended French Union territory. The French Union can hold key positions in Laos and may attempt by attacks against Viet Minh lines of communication, to prevent the Viet Minh from moving southward in force towards southern Laos and Cambodia. We believe, however, that Viet Minh guerrillas in southern Laos will develop sufficient strength to control much of the countryside and that guerrilla activities in Cambodia will be intensified. The French Union probably will reduce, but not eliminate, Viet Minh strength in south Vietnam. Viet Minh infiltration of the Tonkin delta will probably be maintained at a high level and the Viet Minh may undertake major attacks against the delta if they can weaken French defenses by drawing French strength elsewhere.

35. Unless there is a marked improvement in the French Union military position in Indochina, political stability in the Associated States and popular support of the French Union effort against the Viet Minh will decline. We believe that such marked improvement in the military situation is not likely, though a moderate improvement is possible. The over-all French Union position in Indochina therefore will probably deteriorate during the period of this estimate.

36. *Chinese Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action.* The Chinese Communists will have the capability during the period of this estimate to improve airfields in south China, to train Viet Minh pilots, to continue improvement of transportation facilities, and to increase their present level of logistic support for the Viet Minh. The Chinese Communists will probably retain their present capability to commit and support logistically 150,000 Chinese Communist troops for an invasion of Indochina. The combat efficiency of this potential invasion force could probably be increased considerably by the use of combat-seasoned troops who have been rotated from Korea in the past year. The ability of Chinese Communist forces to sustain offensive operations in Indochina would probably be increased should logistic requirements in Korea remain at low levels for a prolonged period.

37. A Chinese Communist force of 150,000, added to Viet Minh forces, would probably be able to overrun the Tonkin delta area before effective assistance could be brought to bear. The Chinese Communists now have, and will probably continue to have during the period of this estimate, sufficient jet and piston aircraft, independent of operations in Korea, for small-scale but damaging attacks against French Union installations in Tonkin. With surprise, they probably could neutralize the French Air Forces in Tonkin. The Chinese Communist air forces do not appear, however, to possess the capability at present of conducting sustained air operations in Indochina because of a lack of improved airfields in south China and stockpiles of supplies. Such preparations would take several months.

38. We believe that whether or not hostilities are concluded in Korea, the Chinese Communists will not invade Indochina during the period of this estimate.⁴ Although they possess the capability, the following considerations militate against intervention by regular Chinese Communist forces or by large numbers of Chinese Communist "volunteers":

⁴The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believes that the intelligence available is insufficient to permit a conclusion at this time that the Chinese Communists will or will not invade Indochina prior to mid-1954.

a. The Communists probably consider that their present strategy in Indochina promises success in a prolonged struggle and produces certain immediate advantages. It diverts badly needed French and US resources from Europe at relatively small cost to the Communists. It provides opportunities to advance international Communist interests while preserving the fiction of "autonomous" national liberation movements, and it provides an instrument, the Viet Minh, with which Communist China and the USSR can indirectly exert military and psychological pressures on the peoples and governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

b. Communist leadership is aware that the West, and in particular the US, would probably retaliate against Communist China if Chinese Communist forces should invade Indochina. We believe that fear of such retaliation and of the major war which might result are important deterrents to open Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina.

39. We believe that the Communist objective to secure control of all Indochina will not be altered by an armistice in Korea or by Communist "peace" tactics. However, the Communists may decide that "peace" maneuvers in Indochina would contribute to the attainment of Communist global objectives, and to the objective of the Viet Minh.

ANNEX A

ESTIMATED GROUND FORCE STRENGTHS AND DISPOSITIONS AS OF 1 APRIL 1953¹

INDOCHINA

A. FRENCH UNION FORCES

COMPONENT	TONKIN	ANNAM & PLATEAUX	COCHIN -CHINA	CAMBODIA	LAOS	TOTAL
<i>Regulars²</i>						
French Expeditionary Corps (CEF)	91,000	20,000	45,000	8,000	7,500	171,500 ³
Associated States Armies	27,000	33,000	20,000	8,500	8,000	96,500
Associated States National Guards	6,000	4,000	10,000	4,000	5,500	29,500
<i>Semi-Military</i>						
CEF Auxiliaries	23,000	6,500	18,000	3,300	2,400	53,200
Vietnam Auxiliaries	8,000	10,000	34,000			52,000
Other Semi-Military	27,000	7,000	30,000	9,000	6,500	79,500
TOTALS	182,000	80,500	157,000	32,800	29,900	482,200

¹These strengths and dispositions were effective before the Viet Minh invasion of Laos. Since that time French Expeditionary Corps (CEF) strength in Laos has been increased to 17,500 and CEF strength in Tonkin reduced to 81,000.

²French Union regular forces are organized into a total of 118 CEF battalions and 95 Associated States battalions. The CEF has 83 infantry, 7 parachute, 8 armored, and 19 artillery battalions and 1 AAA battalion. The Associated States have 87 infantry and 4 artillery battalions and 4 parachute battalions.

³Does not include 6,000 French personnel detached for duty with the Associated States forces as cadres and advisers. Composition of the 172,000 is as follows: French — 51,000; Foreign Legion — 19,000; African — 17,000; North African — 30,000; native Indochinese — 55,000.

ANNEX B

ESTIMATED VIET MINH GROUND FORCE STRENGTHS AND DISPOSITIONS AS OF 1 APRIL 1953¹

B. VIET MINH FORCES

COMPONENT	TONKIN	ANNAM & PLATEAUX	COCHIN -CHINA	CAMBODIA	LAOS	TOTAL
<i>Regulars²</i>						
Army	81,000	25,000	13,000	1,000	3,000	123,000
Regional Forces (Full-time)	35,000	14,500	7,500	3,000	2,000	62,000
<i>Semi-Military</i>						
People's Militia (Armed)	50,000	34,000	25,000	5,000	1,000	115,000
TOTALS	166,000	73,500	45,500	9,000 ³	6,000	300,000

¹These strengths and dispositions changed during the Viet Minh incursion into Laos in April. An estimated 30,000 Viet Minh regulars moved from Tonkin into Laos and an estimated 10,000 moved from Annam. By mid-May, however, it is believed that all but 15,000 of the Viet Minh regulars had returned to their base areas in Tonkin and Annam.

²The Viet Minh are organized into 6 infantry divisions, 1 artillery division, 14 independent regiments, and 15 independent battalions. Regional forces are organized in 44 battalions.

³Some 3,000 dissident Khmer Issarak are also active in Cambodia.

ANNEX C

AIR ORDER OF BATTLE — FRENCH AIR FORCE AND NAVAL AIR ARM, FAR EAST

UNIT DESIGNATION	AIRFIELD	NO. AND TYPE AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED
<i>North Tactical Command</i>		
1st/8 Fighter Squadron	Bach Mai, Hanoi	18 F8F
2nd/8 Fighter Squadron	Cat Bi, Haiphong	20 F8F
Detachment, 1st/21 Fighter Squadron	Cat Bi, Haiphong	7 F8F
1st/25 Lt. Bomber Squadron	Cat Bi, Haiphong	15 B-26
Detachment, 1st/19 Lt. Bomber Squadron	Cat Bi, Haiphong	3 B-26, 1 RB-26
80th Photo Recon. Squadron	Bach Mai, Hanoi	11 F8F
Detachment, 2nd/62 Trans. Squadron	Bach Mai, Hanoi	12 C-47
Detachment, 1st/64 Trans. Squadron	Gia Lam, Hanoi	5 C-47, 3 JU-52
Detachment, 2nd/64 Trans. Squadron	Gia Lam, Hanoi	5 C-47
2nd/62 Trans. Squadron	Do Son, Haiphong	6 C-47
<i>Center Tactical Command</i>		
1st/21 Fighter Squadron	Tourane Afd., Tourane	12 F8F
Detachment 2nd/9 Fighter Squadron	Ban Me Thout Afd., Ban Me Thout	5 F8F
1st/19 Lt. Bomber Squadron	Tourane Afd., Tourane	16 B-26, 3 RB-26
Detachment, 1st/64 Trans. Squadron	Tourane Afd., Tourane	2 JU-52
1st/64 Trans. Squadron	Nhatrang Afd., Nhatrang	5 C-47, 6 JU-52
<i>South Tactical Command</i>		
2nd/9 Fighter Squadron	Tan Son Nhut, Saigon	8 F6F, 10 F8F
2nd/64 Trans. Squadron	Tan Son Nhut, Saigon	16 C-47
Detachment, 1st/64 Trans. Squadron	Tan Son Nhut, Saigon	4 JU-52
Miscellaneous light aircraft and helicopters (used throughout the three tactical commands for liaison, reconnaissance, medical evacuation, and flight training) —		152
TOTAL		345
<i>Naval Air Arm</i>		
Carrier based		22 F6F 12 SB2C-5
Miscellaneous other types		28
TOTAL		62
Aircraft (all types) temporarily unoperational because of shortages in personnel and logistics —		179
GRAND TOTAL		586

ANNEX D

FRENCH NAVAL FORCES IN INDOCHINA

Small Aircraft Carrier (CVL) ¹	1
Gunboat (PG)	2
Escort (PCE)	8
Submarine Chaser (PC)	11
Submarine Chaser (SC)	5
Motor Minesweeper (AMS)	6
Amphibious Vessels:	
LST	4
LSIL	13
LSSL	6
LCU	19
Miscellaneous small landing craft	211
Auxiliary Vessels:	
ARL	1
AG	1
AGS	1
AR	1
AFDL	1
AVP	2
AO	1
Service Craft	54
French Navy Personnel	9,760
Vietnam Navy Personnel	277
Mission Aircraft:	
F6F-5 ²	22
SB2C-5 ²	12
PB4Y-2	8
JRF-5	11
S-51	2
Morane 500 "0"	6
C-47A	1

¹The French have attempted to keep one of their two carriers in Indochina waters, subject to overhaul and repair schedules. The ARROMANCHES (CVL) and the LAFAYETTE (CVL) departed for France in February and May 1953, respectively, for overhaul and repairs.

²Carrier-based aircraft.



October 30, 1953

NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

to the

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

BASIC NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

- References:
- A. NSC 162 and NSC 162/1
 - B. NSC Action Nos. 853, 868, 886, 926 and 944
 - C. Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary, subject, "Review of Basic National Security Policy", dated October 28, 1953
 - D. NSC 153/1
 - E. Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary, subject, "Project Solarium", dated July 23, 1953

The National Security Council, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, the Director, Bureau of the Budget, the Chairman, Council of Economic Advisers, and the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, at the 168th Council meeting on October 29, 1953, adopted the statement of policy contained in NSC 162/1 subject to the changes which are set forth in NSC Action No. 944-a.

In connection with this action the Council also noted:

- a. The President's statement that if the Department of Defense hereafter finds that the provisions of subparagraph 9-a-(1), when read in the context of the total policy statement, operate to the disadvantage of the national security, the Secretary of Defense should bring this finding before the Council for reconsideration.
- b. That action should be promptly taken to conform existing arrangements regarding atomic weapons to subparagraph 39-b.
- c. That the policy in NSC 162/1 does not contemplate any fixed date for D-Day readiness.

- d. That the Planning Board would submit for Council consideration a revision of "U. S. Objectives vis-a-vis the USSR in the Event of War", as presently stated in the Annex, in the light of the provisions of NSC 162/1, as amended.

The President has this date approved the statement of policy contained in NSC 162/1, as amended and adopted by the Council and enclosed herewith, and directs its implementation by all appropriate executive departments and agencies of the U. S. Government. As basic policy, this paper has not been referred to any single department or agency for special coordination.

Accordingly, NSC 153/1 is hereby superseded.

It is requested that special security precautions be observed in the handling of the enclosure and that access to it be very strictly limited on an absolute need-to-know basis.

JAMES S. LAY, Jr.
Executive Secretary

cc: The Secretary of the Treasury
The Attorney General
The Director, Bureau of the Budget
The Chairman, Council of Economic Advisers
The Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission
The Federal Civil Defense Administrator
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Director of Central Intelligence

REVIEW OF BASIC NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

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STATEMENT OF POLICY
by the
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

BASIC NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Basic Problems of National Security Policy

1. a. To meet the Soviet threat to U. S. security.
- b. In doing so, to avoid seriously weakening the U. S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions.

The Soviet Threat to the United States

2. The primary threat to the security, free institutions, and fundamental values of the United States is posed by the combination of:

- a. Basic Soviet hostility to the non-communist world, particularly to the United States.
- b. Great Soviet military power.
- c. Soviet control of the international communist apparatus and other means of subversion or division of the free world.

3. a. The authority of the Soviet regime does not appear to have been impaired by the events since Stalin's death, or to be likely to be appreciably weakened during the next few years. The transfer of power may cause some uncertainty in Soviet and satellite tactics for some time, but will probably not impair the basic economic and military strength of the Soviet bloc. The Soviet rulers can be expected to continue to base their policy on the conviction of irreconcilable hostility between the bloc and the non-communist world. This conviction is the compound product of Marxist belief in their historically determined conflict with, and inevitable triumph over, "world capitalism" led by the United States, of fear

for the security of the regime and the USSR, especially in the face of a hostile coalition, of distrust of U. S. aims and intentions, and of long-established reliance on techniques of conspiracy and subversion. Accordingly, the basic Soviet objectives continue to be consolidation and expansion of their own sphere of power and the eventual domination of the non-communist world.

b. Soviet strategy has been flexible and will probably continue so, allowing for retreats and delays as well as advances. The various "peace gestures" so far have cost the Soviets very little in actual concessions and could be merely designed to divide the West by raising false hopes and seeking to make the United States appear unyielding. It is possible, however, that the USSR, for internal and other reasons, may desire a settlement of specific issues or a relaxation of tensions and military preparations for a substantial period. Thus far, there are no convincing signs of readiness to make important concessions to this end.

4. a. The capability of the USSR to attack the United States with atomic weapons has been continuously growing and will be materially enhanced by hydrogen weapons. The USSR has sufficient bombs and aircraft, using one-way missions, to inflict serious damage on the United States, especially by surprise attack. The USSR soon may have the capability of dealing a crippling blow to our industrial base and our continued ability to prosecute a war. Effective defense could reduce the likelihood and intensity of a hostile attack but not eliminate the chance of a crippling blow.

b. The USSR now devotes about one-sixth of its gross national product to military outlays and is expected to continue this level. It has and will continue to have large conventional military forces capable of aggression against countries of the free world. Within the next two years, the Soviet bloc is not expected to increase the size of its forces, but will strengthen them with improved equipment and training and the larger atomic stockpile.

c. The Soviet bloc now has the capability of strong defense against air attack on critical targets within the USSR under favorable weather conditions, and is likely to continue to strengthen its all-weather air defenses.

5. a. The recent uprisings in East Germany and the unrest in other European satellites evidence the failure of the Soviets fully to subjugate these peoples or to destroy their desire for freedom; the dependence of these satellite governments on Soviet armed forces; and the relative unreliability of satellite armed forces (especially if popular resistance in the satellites should increase). These events necessarily have placed internal and psychological strains upon the Soviet leadership. Nevertheless, the ability of the USSR to exercise effective control over, and to exploit the resources of, the European satellites has not been appreciably reduced and is not likely to be so long as the USSR maintains adequate military forces in the area.

b. The detachment of any major European satellite from the Soviet bloc does not now appear feasible except by Soviet acquiescence or by war. Such a detachment would not decisively affect the Soviet military capability either in delivery of weapons of mass destruction or in conventional forces, but would be a considerable blow to Soviet prestige and would impair in some degree Soviet conventional military capabilities in Europe.

c. The Chinese Communist regime is firmly in control and is unlikely to be shaken in the foreseeable future by domestic forces or rival regimes, short of the occurrence of a major war. The alliance between the regimes of Communist China and the USSR is based on common ideology and current community of interests. With the death of Stalin and the Korean truce, Communist China may tend more to emphasize its own interests, though limited by its present economic and military dependence on the USSR, and, in the long run, basic differences may strain or break the alliance. At present, however, it appears to be firmly established and adds

strategic territory and vast reserves of military manpower to the Soviet bloc.

6. a. The USSR does not seem likely deliberately to launch a general war against the United States during the period covered by current estimates (through mid-1955). The uncertain prospects for Soviet victory in a general war, the change in leadership, satellite unrest, and the U. S. capability to retaliate massively, make such a course improbable. Similarly, an attack on NATO countries or other areas which would be almost certain to bring on general war in view of U. S. commitments or intentions would be unlikely. The Soviets will not, however, be deterred by fear of general war from taking the measures they consider necessary to counter Western actions which they view as a serious threat to their security. ✓

b. When both the USSR and the United States reach a stage of atomic plenty and ample means of delivery, each will have the probable capacity to inflict critical damage on the other, but is not likely to be able to prevent major atomic retaliations. This could create a stalemate, with both sides reluctant to initiate general warfare; although if the Soviets believed that initial surprise held the prospect of destroying the capacity for retaliation, they might be tempted into attacking. ✓

c. Although Soviet fear of atomic reaction should still inhibit local aggression, increasing Soviet atomic capability may tend to diminish the deterrent effect of U. S. atomic power against peripheral Soviet aggression. It may also sharpen the reaction of the USSR to what it considers provocative acts of the United States. If either side should miscalculate the strength of the other's reaction, such local conflicts could grow into general war, even though neither seeks nor desires it. To avoid this, it will in general be desirable for the United States to make clear to the USSR the kind of actions which will be almost certain to lead to this result, recognizing, however, that as general war becomes more devastating for both sides the threat to ✓

resort to it becomes less available as a sanction against local aggression.

7. The USSR will continue to rely heavily on tactics of division and subversion to weaken the free world alliances and will resist the Soviet power. Using both the fear of atomic warfare and the hope of peace, such political warfare will seek to exploit differences among members of the free world, neutralist attitudes, and anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments in underdeveloped areas. For these purposes, communist parties and other cooperating elements will be used to manipulate opinion and control governments wherever possible. This aspect of the Soviet threat is likely to continue indefinitely and to grow in intensity.

8. Over time, changes in the outlook and policies of the leadership of the USSR may result from such factors as the slackening of revolutionary zeal, the growth of vested managerial and bureaucratic interests, and popular pressures for consumption goods. Such changes, combined with the growing strength of the free world and the failure to break its cohesion, and possible aggravation of weaknesses within the Soviet bloc through U. S. or allied action or otherwise, might induce a willingness to negotiate. The Soviet leadership might find it desirable and even essential to reach agreements acceptable to the United States and its allies, without necessarily abandoning its basic hostility to the non-Soviet world.

Defense Against the Soviet Threat

9. In the face of the Soviet threat, the security of the United States requires:

a. Development and maintenance of:

(1) A strong military posture, with emphasis on the capability of inflicting massive retaliatory damage by offensive striking power;

(2) U. S. and allied forces in readiness to move rapidly initially to counter aggression by Soviet bloc forces and to hold vital areas and lines of communication; and

(3) A mobilization base, and its protection against crippling damage, adequate to insure victory in the event of general war.

b. Maintenance of a sound, strong and growing economy, capable of providing through the operation of free institutions, the strength described in a above over the long pull and of rapidly and effectively changing to full mobilization.

c. Maintenance of morale and free institutions and the willingness of the U. S. people to support the measures necessary for national security.

10. In support of these basic security requirements, it is necessary that the United States:

a. Develop and maintain an intelligence system capable of:

(1) Collecting and analyzing indications of hostile intentions that would give maximum prior warning of possible aggression or subversion in any area of the world.

(2) Accurately evaluating the capabilities of foreign countries, friendly and neutral as well as enemy, to undertake military, political, economic, and subversive courses of action affecting U. S. security.

(3) Forecasting potential foreign developments having a bearing on U. S. national security.

b. Develop an adequate manpower program designed to:

(1) Expand scientific and technical training.

(2) Provide an equitable military training system.

(3) Strike a feasible balance between the needs of an expanding peacetime economy and defense requirements.

(4) Provide for an appropriate distribution of services and skills in the event of national emergency.

g. Conduct and foster scientific research and development so as to insure superiority in quantity and quality of weapons systems, with attendant continuing review of the level and composition of forces and of the industrial base required for adequate defense and for successful prosecution of general war.

d. Continue, for as long as necessary, a state of limited defense mobilization to develop military readiness by:

(1) Developing and maintaining production plant capacity, dispersed with a view to minimizing destruction by enemy attack and capable of rapid expansion or prompt conversion to essential wartime output.

(2) Creating and maintaining minimum essential reserve stocks of selected end-items, so located as to support promptly and effectively the war effort in areas of probable commitment until war production and shipping capacity reaches the required wartime levels.

(3) Maintaining stockpiling programs, and providing additional production facilities, for those materials the shortage of which would affect critically essential defense programs; meanwhile reducing the rates of other stockpile materials.

e. Provide reasonable internal security against covert attack, sabotage, subversion, and espionage, particularly against the clandestine introduction and detonation of atomic weapons.

11. Within the free world, only the United States can provide and maintain, for a period of years to come, the atomic capability to counterbalance Soviet atomic power. Thus, sufficient atomic weapons and effective means of delivery are indispensable for U. S. security. Moreover, in the face of Soviet atomic power, defense of the continental United States becomes

vital to effective security: to protect our striking force, our mobilization base, and our people. Such atomic capability is also a major contribution to the security of our allies, as well as of this country.

12. The United States cannot, however, meet its defense needs, even at exorbitant cost, without the support of allies.

a. The effective use of U. S. strategic air power against the USSR will require overseas bases on foreign territory for some years to come. Such bases will continue indefinitely to be an important additional element of U. S. strategic air capability and to be essential to the conduct of the military operations on the Eurasian continent in case of general war. The availability of such bases and their use by the United States in case of need will depend, in most cases, on the consent and cooperation of the nations where they are located. Such nations will assume the risks entailed only if convinced that their own security will thereby be best served.

b. The United States needs to have aligned on its side in the world struggle, in peace and in war, the armed forces and economic resources and materials of the major highly-industrialized non-communist states. Progressive loss to the Soviet bloc of these states would so isolate the United States and alter the world balance as to endanger the capacity of the United States to win in the event of general war or to maintain an adequate defense without undermining its fundamental institutions.

c. U. S. strategy including the use of atomic weapons, therefore, can be successfully carried out only if our essential allies are convinced that it is conceived and will be implemented for the purpose of mutual security and defense against the Soviet threat. U. S. leadership in this regard, however, does not imply the necessity to meet all desires of our allies.

d. Our allies are, in turn, dependent on the United States for their security: (1) they lack that atomic capability which is the major deterrent to Soviet aggression; (2) most lack political and economic stability sufficient to support their military forces. The United States should be able for the foreseeable future to provide military aid, in more limited amounts than heretofore, to our essential allies. It should be possible in the near future, however, generally to eliminate most grant economic aid, if coupled with appropriate U. S. economic and trade policies.

13. a. Under existing treaties or policies, an attack on the NATO countries, Western Germany, Berlin, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and the American Republics, or on the Republic of Korea, would involve the United States in war with the USSR, or at least with Communist China if the aggression were Chinese alone.

b. Certain other countries, such as Indo-China or Formosa, are of such strategic importance to the United States that an attack on them probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressor. Moreover, the principle of collective security through the United Nations, if it is to continue to survive as a deterrent to continued piecemeal aggression and a promise of an eventual effective world security system, should be upheld even in areas not of vital strategic importance.

c. The assumption by the United States, as the leader of the free world, of a substantial degree of responsibility for the freedom and security of the free nations is a direct and essential contribution to the maintenance of its own freedom and security.

14. a. The United States should keep open the possibility of settlements with the USSR, compatible with basic U. S. security interests, which would resolve specific conflicts or reduce the magnitude of the Soviet threat. Moreover, to maintain the continued support of its allies,

the United States must seek to convince them of its desire to reach such settlements. But, in doing so, we must not allow the possibility of such settlements to delay or reduce efforts to develop and maintain adequate free world strength, and thus enable the Soviets to increase their relative strength.

b. It must be recognized, however, that the prospects for acceptable negotiated settlements are not encouraging. There is no evidence that the Soviet leadership is prepared to modify its basic attitudes and accept any permanent settlement with the United States, although it may be prepared for a modus vivendi on certain issues. Atomic and other major weapons can be controlled only by adequate and enforceable safeguards which would involve some form of international inspection and supervision. Acceptance of such serious restrictions by either side would be extremely difficult under existing conditions of suspicion and distrust. The chances for such disarmament would perhaps be improved by agreements on other conflicts either beforehand or at the same time, or by possible realization by the Soviets, in time, that armament limitation will serve their own interests and security.

c. The United States should promptly determine what it would accept as an adequate system of armament control which would effectively remove or reduce the Soviet atomic and military threat, and on what basis the United States would be prepared to negotiate to obtain it.

Present State of the Coalition*

15. a. The effort of the United States, especially since 1950, to build up the strength, cohesion and common determination of the free world has succeeded in increasing its relative strength and may well have prevented overt military aggression since Korea.

*The term "coalition" refers to those states which are parties to the network of security treaties and regional alliances of which the United States is a member (NATO, OAS, ANZUS, Japan, etc.), or are otherwise actively associated in the defense of the free world.

b. In Western Europe the build-up of military strength and the progress of economic recovery has, at least partially, remedied a situation of glaring weakness in a vital area. NATO and associated forces are now sufficient to make aggressive action in Europe costly for the USSR and to create a greater feeling of confidence and security among the Western European peoples. However, even though significant progress has been made in building up these forces, the military strength in Western Europe is presently not sufficient to prevent a full-scale Soviet attack from overrunning Western Europe. Even with the availability of those German forces presently planned within the framework of EDC, present rates of defense spending by European Nations and present rates of U. S. Military Assistance certainly could not be expected to produce forces adequate to prevent the initial loss of a considerable portion of the territory of Western Europe in the event of a full-scale Soviet attack. Therefore, since U. S. Military Assistance must eventually be reduced, it is essential that the Western European states, including West Germany, build and maintain maximum feasible defensive strength. The major deterrent to aggression against Western Europe is the manifest determination of the United States to use its atomic capability and massive retaliatory striking power if the area is attacked. However, the presence of U. S. forces in Western Europe makes a contribution other than military to the strength and cohesion of the free world coalition.

c. In the Far East, the military strength of the coalition now rests largely on U. S. military power plus that of France in Indochina, the UK in Malaya and Hong Kong, and the indigenous forces of the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, and Nationalist China. Any material increase will require the revival of the economic and military strength of Japan.

d. The strength and cohesion of the coalition depends, and will continue to depend, on the continuing strength and will of the United States as its leader, and upon the assumption by each coalition member of a proper share of responsibility.

16. While the coalition is founded on common interest and remains basically sound, certain factors tend to weaken its cohesion and to slow down the necessary build-up of strength.

a. Some of these factors are inherent in the nature of a coalition led by one strong power. The economic and military recovery by our NATO allies from their low point of a few years ago, and the revival of Germany and Japan, has given them a greater sense of independence from U. S. guidance and direction. Specific sources of irritation are trade with the Soviet bloc, the level of the defense effort, use of bases and other facilities, and the prospect of discontinuance of U. S. economic aid without a corresponding change in U. S. trade policies.

b. The coalition also suffers from certain other weaknesses and dilemmas. A major weakness is the instability of the governments of certain NATO partners, such as Italy and France. The colonial issue in Asia and Africa, for example, has not only weakened our European allies but has left those areas in a state of ferment which weakens the whole free world. Efforts by the United States to encourage orderly settlements tend to leave both sides dissatisfied and to create friction within the alliance. Age-old issues such as divide France and Germany, or Italy and Yugoslavia, still impede creation of a solid basis of cooperation against the Soviet threat.

c. Moreover, allied opinion, especially in Europe, has become less willing to follow U. S. leadership. Many Europeans fear that American policies, particularly in the Far East, may involve Europe in general war, or will indefinitely prolong cold-war tensions. Many consider U. S. attitudes toward the Soviets as too rigid and unyielding and, at the same time, as unstable, holding risks ranging from preventive war and "liberation" to withdrawal into isolation. Many consider that these policies fail to reflect the perspective and confidence expected in the leadership of a great nation, and reflect too great a pre-occupation with anti-communism. Important

sectors of allied opinion are also concerned over developments within the United States which seem to them inconsistent with our assumed role of leader in the cause of freedom. These allied attitudes materially impair cooperation and, if not overcome, could imperil the coalition.

d. Fear of what a general war will mean for them is deeply rooted and widespread among our allies. They tend to see the actual danger of Soviet aggression as less imminent than the United States does, and some have a fatalistic feeling that if it is coming they will not be able to do much about it. In the NATO countries, many have serious doubts whether the defense requirements can be met without intolerable political and economic strains. Certain of our allies fear the rearmament of Germany and Japan on any large scale, and in Germany and Japan themselves strong currents of opinion oppose it as unnecessary or dangerous. Moreover, in certain countries, particularly France and Italy, grave domestic problems have called into question not only the authority of the governments, but also the basic foreign policies and alignments which they have followed. All these factors lead to allied pressure in favor of new major efforts to negotiate with the USSR, as the only hope of ending the present tension, fear and frustration. This pressure has increased with recent "peace gestures" of the new Soviet leadership, which has made every endeavor to exploit it. Whether these hopes are illusory or well-founded, they must be taken into consideration by the United States.

The Uncommitted Areas of the World

17. Despite the Soviet threat, many nations and societies outside the Soviet bloc, mostly in the underdeveloped areas, are so unsure of their national interests, or so preoccupied with other pressing problems, that they are presently unwilling to align themselves actively with the United States and its allies. Although largely undeveloped, their vast manpower, their essential raw materials and their potential for growth are such that their absorption within the Soviet system would greatly, perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power to our detriment. Conversely, their orderly development into more stable and responsible nations, able and willing to participate in defense of the free world, can increasingly add to its strength.

18. In many of these uncommitted areas, forces of unrest and of resentment against the West are strong. Among these sources are racial feelings, anti-colonialism, rising nationalism, popular demand for rapid social and economic progress, over-population, the breakdown of static social patterns, and, in many cases, the conflict of local religious and social philosophies with those of the West. The general unreliability of the governments of these states and the volatility of their political life complicate the task of building firm ties with them, of counteracting neutralism and, where appropriate and feasible, of responding to requests for assistance in solving their problems. Outside economic assistance alone cannot be counted on either to solve their basic problems or to win their cooperation and support. Constructive political and other measures will be required to create a sense of mutuality of interest with the free world and to counter the communist appeals.

U. S. Ability to Support Security Expenditures

19. The United States must maintain a sound economy based on free private enterprise as a basis both for high defense productivity and for the maintenance of its living standards and free institutions. Not only the world position of the United States, but the security of the whole free world, is dependent on the avoidance of recession and on the long-term expansion of the U. S. economy. Threats to its stability or growth, therefore, constitute a danger to the security of the United States and of the coalition which it leads. Expenditures for national security, in fact all federal, state and local governmental expenditures, must be carefully scrutinized with a view to measuring their impact on the national economy.

20. The economy of the country has a potential for long-term economic growth. Over the years an expanding national income can provide the basis for higher standards of living and for a substantial military program. But economic growth is not automatic and requires fiscal and other policies which will foster and not hamper the potential for long-term growth and which will operate to reduce cyclical fluctuations.

X 21. Excessive government spending leads to inflationary deficits or to repressive taxation, or to both. Persistent inflation is a barrier to long-term growth because it undermines confidence in the currency, reduces savings, and makes restrictive economic controls necessary. Repressive taxation weakens the incentives for efficiency, effort, and investment on which economic growth depends.

22. In spite of the reimposition of tax rates at approximately the peak levels of World War II, expenditures have risen faster than tax receipts, with a resulting deficit of \$9.4 billion in fiscal year 1953. Despite anticipated larger receipts, without the imposition of new taxes, and assuming substantially unchanged world conditions, a deficit of \$3.8 billion is estimated for fiscal year 1954.

23. a. Under existing law, tax reductions of \$5 billion a year will become effective next January. A proposal to impose substitute taxes therefor would be a reversal of policy.

b. Additional revenue losses of \$3 billion a year are due to occur on April 1, 1954. Congress has not acted on the President's recommendation that these reductions be rescinded. Even if the \$3 billion reduction is rescinded, or offset by revenue from new sources, large deficits would occur in FY 1955 and FY 1956 at present levels of expenditures.

c. The economic problem is made more difficult by the need to reform the tax system in the interests of long-term economic growth. Inevitably, many of the changes necessary to reduce the barriers to growth will lead to a loss of revenue in the years immediately following their adoption.

24. Any additional revenue will have to be secured by new taxation on a broad base.

25. The present high level of the Government debt further complicates the financial and economic problems of the country. Substantial additional borrowing could come only from sources which would be inflationary.

26. There is no precise level or duration of government expenditures which can be determined in advance, at which an economic system will be seriously damaged from inflationary borrowing on the one hand or from repressive taxation on the other. The higher the level of expenditures, the greater is the need for sound policies and the greater are the dangers of miscalculations and mischance. These dangers are now substantial.

27. The requirements for funds to maintain our national security must thus be considered in the light of these dangers to our economic system, including the danger to industrial productivity necessary to support military programs, arising from excessive levels of total Government spending, taxing and borrowing.

28. Modifications of the foregoing fiscal policies to promote long-term growth may be necessitated for a limited period: (1) to deal with short-term cyclical problems or (2) to achieve overriding national objectives that justify departure from sound fiscal policies.

The Situation as to U. S. Manpower

29. a. The national security programs of the United States rest upon the manpower to operate them, the economy to produce the material for them, and the financial resources to pay for them.

b. The qualified manpower annually coming of military age is adequate to carry out our existing military programs. However, the continuing development of more complicated weapons, machines, and devices used by the military greatly increases the need for military manpower possessed of higher skills, and for their better utilization, and emphasizes the need for expanded technical training and retention of technically trained personnel.

c. Any considerable increase in the need for military manpower would require consideration of:

(1) Broadening the present criteria governing draft eligibility.

(2) Broadening the physical requirements for enlistment, particularly to secure technicians.

(3) Extension of the average length of military service, including increased incentives for re-enlistment.

(4) Increased recruitment of long-term volunteers and of women.

(5) Greater use of civilians for technical maintenance work.

(6) Leadership to develop a national response to increased needs, including steps to make military service a matter of patriotic pride and to increase the attractiveness of a military career.

d. Any decisions on these matters should be made in the light of a comprehensive study, to be submitted to the President by the Office of Defense Mobilization by December 1, on manpower availability under varying assumptions as to the degree and nature of mobilization requirements.

Morale

30. Support for the necessary security programs, based upon a sound productive system, is ultimately dependent also upon the soundness of the national morale and the political willingness of the country to support a government which it feels is holding the proper balance between the necessary sacrifices and the necessary defense. Accordingly, the American people must be informed of the nature of the Soviet-Communist threat, in particular the danger inherent in the increasing Soviet atomic capability; of the basic community of interest among the nations of the free world; and of the need for mobilizing the spiritual and material resources necessary to meet the Soviet threat.

POLICY CONCLUSIONS

Basic Problems of National Security Policy

31. a. To meet the Soviet threat to U. S. security.

b. In doing so, to avoid seriously weakening the U. S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions.

Nature of the Soviet Threat

32. a. With increasing atomic power, the Soviets have a mounting capability of inflicting very serious and possibly crippling damage on the United States. The USSR will also continue to have large military forces capable of aggressive action against countries of the free world. Present estimates are, however, that the USSR will not deliberately initiate general war during the next several years, although general war might result from miscalculation. In the absence of general war, a prolonged period of tension may ensue, during which each side increases its armaments, reaches atomic plenty and seeks to improve its relative power position.

b. In any case, the Soviets will continue to seek to divide and weaken the free world coalition, to absorb or win the allegiance of the presently uncommitted areas of the world, and to isolate the United States, using cold war tactics and the communist apparatus. Their capacity for political warfare against the United States as well as its allies will be enhanced by their increased atomic capability.

33. a. A sound, strong, and growing U. S. economy is necessary to support over the long pull a satisfactory posture of defense in the free world and a U. S. capability rapidly and effectively to change to full mobilization. The United States should not weaken its capacity for high productivity for defense, its free institutions, and the incentives on which its long-term economic growth depends.

b. A recession in the level of U. S. economic activity could seriously prejudice the security of the free world.

Defense Against Soviet Power and Action

34. In the face of these threats, the United States must develop and maintain, at the lowest feasible cost, requisite military and non-military strength to deter and, if necessary, to counter Soviet military aggression against the United States or other areas vital to its security.

a. The risk of Soviet aggression will be minimized by maintaining a strong security posture, with emphasis on adequate offensive retaliatory strength and defensive strength. This must be based on massive atomic capability, including necessary bases; an integrated and effective continental defense system; ready forces of the United States and its allies suitably deployed and adequate to deter or initially to counter aggression, and to discharge required initial tasks in the event of a general war; and an adequate mobilization base; all supported by the determined spirit of the U. S. people.

b. This strong security posture must also be supported by an effective U. S. intelligence system, an adequate manpower program, superior scientific research and development, a program of limited defense mobilization, reasonable internal security, and an informed American people.

c. Such a strong security posture is essential to counter the Soviet divisive tactics and hold together the coalition. If our allies were uncertain about our ability or will to counter Soviet aggression, they would be strongly tempted to adopt a neutralist position, especially in the face of the atomic threat.

35. In the interest of its own security, the United States must have the support of allies.

a. The military striking power necessary to retaliate depends for the foreseeable future on having bases in allied countries. Furthermore, the ground forces required to counter local aggressions must be supplied largely by our allies.

b. The loss of major allies by subversion, divisive tactics, or the growth of neutralist attitudes, would seriously affect the security of the United States.

36. United States policies must, therefore, be designed to retain the cooperation of our allies, to seek to win the friendship and cooperation of the presently uncommitted areas of the world, and thereby to strengthen the cohesion of the free world.

a. Our allies must be genuinely convinced that our strategy is one of collective security. The alliance must be rooted in a strong feeling of a community of interest and firm confidence in the steadiness and wisdom of U. S. leadership.

b. Cooperative efforts, including equitable contributions by our allies, will continue to be necessary to build the military, economic and political strength of the coalition and the stability of the free world.

c. Constructive U. S. policies, not related solely to anti-communism, are needed to persuade uncommitted countries that their best interests lie in greater cooperation and stronger affiliations with the rest of the free world.

d. To enhance the capacity of free world nations for self-support and defense, and to reduce progressively their need for U. S. aid, the United States should assist in stimulating international trade, freer access to markets and raw materials, and the healthy growth of underdeveloped areas. In this connection, it should consider a modification of its tariff and trade policies.

e. In subsequent fiscal years economic grant aid and loans by the United States to other nations of the free world should be based on the best interests of the United States.

37. a. In Western Europe, a position of strength must be based mainly on British, French, and German cooperation in the defense of the continent. To achieve a stronger Europe, the United States should support, as long as there is hope of early success, the building of an integrated European Community (including West Germany and if possible a united Germany), linked to the United States through NATO. The United States should press for a strong, united stable Germany, oriented to the free world and militarily capable of overcoming internal subversion and disorder and also of taking a major part in the collective defense of the free world against aggression. The United States must continue to assist in creating and maintaining mutually agreed European forces, but should reduce such assistance as rapidly as United States interests permit.

b. In the Far East, strength must be built on existing bilateral and multilateral security arrangements until more comprehensive regional arrangements become feasible. The United States should stress assistance in developing Japan as a major element of strength. The United States should maintain the security of the off-shore island chain and continue to develop the defensive capacity of Korea and Southeast Asia in accordance with existing commitments.

c. In the Middle East, a strong regional grouping is not now feasible. In order to assure during peace time for the United States and its allies the resources (especially oil) and the strategic positions of the area and their denial to the Soviet bloc, the United States should build on Turkey, Pakistan and, if possible, Iran, and assist in achieving stability in the Middle East by political actions and limited military and economic assistance, and technical assistance, to other countries in the area.

d. In other areas of the free world the United States should furnish limited military aid, and limited technical and economic assistance, to other free nations, according to the calculated advantage of such aid to the U. S. world position.

38. a. As presently deployed in support of our commitments, the armed forces of the United States are over-extended, thereby depriving us of mobility and initiative for future military action in defense of the free world.

b. Under present conditions, however, any major withdrawal of U. S. forces from Europe or the Far East would be interpreted as a diminution of U. S. interest in the defense of these areas and would seriously undermine the strength and cohesion of the coalition.

c. Our diplomacy must concentrate upon clarifying to our allies in parts of the world not gripped by war conditions that the best defense of the free world rests upon a deployment of U. S. forces which permits initiative, flexibility and support; upon our political commitment to strike back hard directly against any aggressor who attacks such allies; and upon such allies' own indigenous security efforts.

39. a. In specific situations where a warning appears desirable and feasible as an added deterrent, the United States should make clear to the USSR and Communist China, in general terms or with reference to specific areas as the situation requires, its intention to react with military force against any aggression by Soviet bloc armed forces.

b. (1) In the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons to be as available for use as other munitions. Where the consent of an ally is required for the use of these weapons from U. S. bases on the territory of such ally, the United States should promptly obtain the advance consent of such ally for such use. The United States should also seek, as and when feasible, the understanding and approval of this policy by free nations.

(2) This policy should not be made public without further consideration by the National Security Council.

Defense Against the Threat to the U. S. Economy and Institutions

40. a. A strong, healthy and expanding U. S. economy is essential to the security and stability of the free world. In the interest of both the United States and its allies, it is vital that the support of defense expenditures should not seriously impair the basic soundness of the U. S. economy by undermining incentives or by inflation.

b. The United States must, however, meet the necessary costs of the policies essential for its security. The actual level of such costs cannot be estimated until further study, but should be kept to the minimum consistent with the carrying out of these policies.

c. Barring basic change in the world situation, the Federal Government should continue to make a determined effort to bring its total annual expenditures into balance, or into substantial balance with its total annual revenues and should maintain over-all credit and fiscal policies designed to assist in stabilizing the economy.

d. Every effort should be made to eliminate waste, duplication, and unnecessary overhead in the Federal Government, and to minimize Federal expenditures for programs that are not essential to the national security.

e. The United States should seek to maintain a higher and expanding rate of economic activity at relatively stable price levels.

f. The economic potential of private enterprise should be maximized by minimizing governmental controls and regulations, and by encouraging private enterprise to develop natural and technological resources (e.g. nuclear power).

41. To support the necessarily heavy burdens for national security, the morale of the citizens of the United States must be based both on responsibility and freedom for the individual. The dangers from Soviet subversion and espionage require strong and effective

security measures. Eternal vigilance, however, is needed in their exercise to prevent the intimidation of free criticism. It is essential that necessary measures of protection should not be so used as to destroy the national unity based on freedom, not on fear.

Reduction of the Soviet Threat

42. a. The United States must seek to improve the power position of itself and the rest of the free world in relation to the Soviet bloc.

b. The United States must also keep open the possibility of negotiating with the USSR and Communist China acceptable and enforceable agreements, whether limited to individual issues now outstanding or involving a general settlement of major issues, including control of armaments.

c. The willingness of the Soviet leadership to negotiate acceptable settlements, without necessarily abandoning hostility to the non-Soviet world, may tend to increase over time, if the United States and its allies develop and increase their own strength, determination and cohesion, maintain retaliatory power sufficient to insure unacceptable damage to the Soviet system should the USSR resort to general war, and prove that the free world can prosper despite Soviet pressures, or if for any reason Soviet stability and influence are reduced.

d. The policy of the United States is to prevent Soviet aggression and continuing domination of other nations, and to establish an effective control of armaments under proper safeguards; but is not to dictate the internal political and economic organization of the USSR.*

43. As a means of reducing Soviet capabilities for extending control and influence in the free world, the United States should:

* This paragraph does not establish policy guidance for our propaganda or informational activities.

a. Take overt and covert measures to discredit Soviet prestige and ideology as effective instruments of Soviet power, and to reduce the strength of communist parties and other pro-Soviet elements.

b. Take all feasible diplomatic, political, economic and covert measures to counter any threat of a party or individuals directly or indirectly responsive to Soviet control to achieve dominant power in a free world country.

c. Undertake selective, positive actions to eliminate Soviet-Communist control over any areas of the free world.

44. a. Measures to impose pressures on the Soviet bloc should take into account the desirability of creating conditions which will induce the Soviet leadership to be more receptive to acceptable negotiated settlements.

b. Accordingly, the United States should take feasible political, economic, propaganda and covert measures designed to create and exploit troublesome problems for the USSR, impair Soviet relations with Communist China, complicate control in the satellites, and retard the growth of the military and economic potential of the Soviet bloc.

45. In the face of the developing Soviet threat, the broad aim of U. S. security policies must be to create, prior to the achievement of mutual atomic plenty, conditions under which the United States and the free world coalition are prepared to meet the Soviet-Communist threat with resolution and to negotiate for its alleviation under proper safeguards. The United States and its allies must always seek to create and sustain the hope and confidence of the free world in the ability of its basic ideas and institutions not merely to oppose the communist threat, but to provide a way of life superior to Communism.

46. The foregoing conclusions are valid only so long as the United States maintains a retaliatory capability that cannot be neutralized by a surprise Soviet attack. Therefore, there must be continuing examination and periodic report to the National Security Council in regard to the likelihood of such neutralization of U. S. retaliatory capability.

ANNEX

U. S. OBJECTIVES VIS-A-VIS THE USSR IN THE EVENT OF WAR
(The following paragraphs are taken verbatim from MSC 20/4, approved in November, 1948. They also formed an annex to MSC 153/1, approved in June, 1953. This subject is currently under review by the MSC Planning Board.)

1. In the event of war with the USSR we should endeavor by successful military and other operations to create conditions which would permit satisfactory accomplishment of U. S. objectives without a predetermined requirement for unconditional surrender. War aims supplemental to our peace-time aims should include:

a. Eliminating Soviet Russian domination in areas outside the borders of any Russian state allowed to exist after the war.

b. Destroying the structure of relationships by which leaders of the All-Union Communist Party have been able to exert moral and disciplinary authority over individual citizens, or groups of citizens, in countries not under communist control.

c. Assuring that any regime or regimes which may exist on traditional Russian territory in the aftermath of a war:

(1) Do not have sufficient military power to wage aggressive war.

(2) Impose nothing resembling the present iron curtain over contacts with the outside world.

d. In addition, if any bolshevik regime is left in any part of the Soviet Union, insuring that it does not control enough of the military-industrial potential of the Soviet Union to enable it to wage war on comparable terms with any other regime or regimes which may exist on traditional Russian territory.

e. Seeking to create postwar conditions which will:

(1) Prevent the development of power relationships dangerous to the security of the United States and international peace.

(2) Be conducive to the successful development of an effective world organization based upon the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

(3) Permit the earliest practicable discontinuance within the United States of wartime controls.

2. In pursuing the above war aims, we should avoid making irrevocable or premature decisions or commitments respecting border rearrangements, administration of government within enemy territory, independence for national minorities, or post-war responsibility for the readjustment of the inevitable political, economic, and social dislocations resulting from the war.

SPECIAL ESTIMATE

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PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN
POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION IN
INDOCHINA THROUGH 1954



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO CERTAIN POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION IN INDOCHINA THROUGH 1954

THE PROBLEM¹

To estimate the probable reactions of Communist China and the USSR to:

- a. The commitment in Indochina, before the end of 1954, of US ground, air, and naval forces on a scale sufficient to defeat decisively the field forces of the Viet Minh.
- b. The commitment in Indochina, before the end of 1954, of US ground, air, and naval forces on a scale sufficient to hold the Viet Minh in check until such time as US-developed Vietnamese forces could decisively defeat the field forces of the Viet Minh.

ASSUMPTIONS¹

For both a. and b. above:

1. No Chinese Communist intervention in force in Indochina had taken place.
2. Commitment of US forces had been publicly requested by the French and Vietnamese governments.
3. At the time of the US commitment French Union forces still retained essentially their present position in the Tonkin Delta.
4. Communist China and the USSR would have prior knowledge of the US intent to commit its forces in Indochina.
5. Following the US commitment, there would be a phased withdrawal of French forces from Indochina.
6. The US will warn the Chinese Communists that if they openly intervene² in the fighting in Indochina, the US will not limit its military action to Indochina.

ESTIMATE

1. We believe that the Communists would assume that the purpose of committing US forces in Indochina was the decisive defeat of the Viet Minh. Consequently, we believe that Communist reactions to such a US commitment would be substantially the same whether

it were designed to defeat the Viet Minh with US forces (Problem a.) or eventually with US-trained Vietnam forces (Problem b.).

In the Event of a Pending US Commitment

2. We do not believe that Communist China, upon learning of a forthcoming commitment by the US, would immediately intervene openly with substantial forces in Indochina. The acceptance by Communist China of an armistice in Korea, its policies to date with respect to Indochina, and its present emphasis on

¹The Problem and the Assumptions have been provided to the intelligence community as a basis for the estimate.

²For the purposes of this estimate, open intervention is defined as the commitment of substantial Chinese Communist combat forces, under any guise.

domestic problems seem to indicate a desire at this time to avoid open intervention in the Indochina war or expansion of the conflict to Communist China. US warnings against Chinese Communist intervention in force³ probably would have a strong deterrent effect. Moreover, the political advantage to be gained by portraying the US as an "aggressor" would probably appear both to Communist China and the USSR to outweigh the military advantage of moving large Chinese Communist forces into Indochina before the arrival of US forces.

3. In addition, Communist leadership would probably estimate that they would have time to take a number of steps which, without a serious risk of expanding the war to China, might deter a US military commitment or seriously impair its effectiveness. Such steps might include:

a. Increasing logistic and rear area support to the Viet Minh.

b. Covertly committing Chinese troops to operate as "Viet Minh guerrillas."

c. Encouraging intensified Viet Minh guerrilla and sabotage operations in Indochina, particularly in and around the Tonkin Delta, designed to inflict such damage on the French Union position as to increase the difficulties of the US operation.

d. Building up Chinese Communist strength in south China, including Hainan.

e. Seeking by diplomatic and propaganda means in the UN and elsewhere to forestall US action, to gain the support of non-Communist countries, and to exploit differences between the US and its allies over preparations for this operation.

³Such warnings would reinforce the warning already given by Secretary of State Dulles, in his American Legion Speech at St. Louis, 2 September 1953:

"Communist China has been and now is training, equipping and supplying the Communist forces in Indochina. There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own army into Indochina. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined in Indochina. I say this soberly in the interest of peace and in the hope of preventing another aggressor miscalculation."

f. Concluding a defense pact with the Viet Minh.

Although, in response to a US military commitment in Indochina, the Communists might threaten to renew hostilities in Korea, we believe that they would not actually take such action as they probably estimate that renewed aggression in Korea would result in expanding the conflict to Communist China itself.

Actual US Commitment

4. In the initial stages of an actual US military commitment, the Communists might not feel compelled to intervene openly in force immediately. They would recognize the difficulties which the US forces would face in operating in the Indochina climate and terrain. They would also realize that the xenophobia of the indigenous population of Indochina might be effectively exploited to the disadvantage of US forces by Communist propaganda; the Chinese Communists would therefore prefer that the US rather than themselves be confronted with this antiforeign attitude. They might estimate that, with increased aid from Communist China, the Viet Minh forces, by employing harassing and infiltrating tactics and avoiding major engagements, could make any US advance at the least slow and difficult. It is probable, therefore, that the Chinese Communists would initially follow a cautious military policy while they assessed the scale, nature, and probable success of the US action, the effect of such action on Vietnamese national morale and military capabilities, the subsequent military and political moves of the French, the temper of US opinion, the reactions of US allies and the neutralist states, and the position of the UN. Even at this early stage, however, the Chinese Communists would probably take strong actions short of open intervention in an effort to prevent the US from destroying the Viet Minh armed forces.⁴

⁴The Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State, believes that the timing of the Communist reaction to the commitment of US forces in Indochina cannot be estimated with any degree of assurance. He therefore believes that a decision by the Communists to follow a cautious policy in the initial stages of the US action should be presented as a possibility, rather than as a probability.

5. In addition to the steps outlined in paragraph 3 above, the Chinese Communists, at this early stage of US commitment, would probably provide an increased number of military advisors, possibly including commanders for major Viet Minh units. Moreover, Peiping might covertly furnish limited air support for Viet Minh ground forces, but would be unlikely to undertake air operations which it estimated would provoke US retaliation against Communist China itself other than retaliation against those airfields from which such air attacks were launched.

6. If the leaders of Communist China and the USSR came to believe that a protracted stalemate in Indochina was likely, they would probably not openly commit Chinese Communist ground, naval, or air forces to an intervention in force in Indochina, nor would they renew hostilities in Korea or commit new acts of armed aggression elsewhere in the Far East. Peiping and Moscow would probably believe that a long and indecisive war in Indochina could be exploited politically and that, in time, US and Vietnamese will to fight might be worn down.

7. If at any time, however, the leaders of Communist China and the USSR came to believe that a decisive defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces was likely, they would be faced with the decision whether Communist China should intervene openly in force in order to avert this development.

8. The following considerations might induce the Communists to decide in favor of open intervention in force:

a. Decisive defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces would be a grave blow to Communist prestige throughout the world and would seriously diminish prospects for the expansion of Communism in Asia.

b. A US military commitment in Indochina might form part of a larger plan, possibly involving, in the minds of the Communists, the resurgence of Chinese Nationalist strength, aimed at the destruction of the Chinese Communist regime. In any case, decisive defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces would bring US power to the borders of China.

c. Whatever the initial intention, successful US military action in Indochina might encourage the US to increase pressure on other points of the Communist periphery.

d. Many observers, particularly in the Asian neutralist states, would consider the US in the wrong in Indochina and would condone Chinese Communist intervention as a move to "liberate Indochina from American imperialism." These sentiments could be effectively exploited by Communist propaganda.

e. The US, despite its warnings, might not retaliate strongly against Communist China, because it would fear that such retaliation would alienate its NATO allies, result in wider military deployment of US forces, cause Peiping to invoke the Sino-Soviet treaty, and thereby increase the danger of general war.

f. By intervening openly in force the Chinese Communists might be able to prevent indefinitely both the successful accomplishment of the US mission and the disengagement of substantial US forces from Indochina.

9. On the other hand, the following considerations might deter the Communists from deciding to intervene openly in force:

a. It would be more important to concentrate upon domestic problems including strengthening of Communist China's economy.

b. There would be a grave risk of US reprisals against Communist China and possibly of general war.

c. Indochina is remote from the USSR and the centers of power in Communist China. Accordingly, the establishment of a strong US position in Indochina would not constitute, to the same degree as in Korea, a threat to Chinese Communist and Soviet power in the Far East.

d. Short of actual intervention, the Chinese Communists could acquire a position of strength by reinforcing and rehabilitating the military facilities on Hainan. This position would dominate the Gulf of Tonkin, and pose a distinct threat to sea-air lines of communications of US forces in Indochina and to rear bases.

e. The loss in prestige involved in the defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces could in part be offset by depicting the Viet Minh as an indigenous liberation movement. Moreover, the Viet Minh Government and its armed forces could be preserved on Chinese soil where they could exercise constant military and political pressure on the forces of the US and the Associated States.

f. The military and political nature of the Indochina war is such that even if the US defeated the Viet Minh field forces, guerrilla action could probably be continued indefinitely and preclude the establishment of complete non-Communist control over that area.

g. Under such circumstances, the US might have to maintain a military commitment in Indochina for years to come. Heavy US commitments in Indochina over the long run might cause concern to US allies and might create divergences between the US and neutralist states.

10. The Director of Central Intelligence and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believe that the Communist reaction to commitment of US forces in Indochina would largely depend upon US posture prior to, and at the same time of, such commitment. If the US posture made manifest to the Communists that US naval and air retaliatory power would be fully applied to Communist China, then Peiping and Moscow would seek to avoid courses of action which would bring about such retaliation. In such circumstances, the chances are better than even that the Chinese Communists would not openly intervene in Indochina, even if they believed that failure to intervene would mean the defeat at that time of the Viet Minh field forces in Indochina. Therefore the Director of Central Intelligence and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believe that in weighing the arguments set forth in paragraphs 8 and 9 Chinese Communist leaders, in such circumstances, would estimate that it was more advantageous to them to support a guerrilla action in Indochina and tie down large US forces in such a war, than to risk US retaliatory action against China itself which open intervention would involve. However, the Communists would almost certainly continue to support the rem-

nants of the Viet Minh, including re-equipping these remnant forces on the Chinese side of the border and possibly augmenting them with Chinese "volunteers" so that Viet Minh resistance could be continued indefinitely. Moreover, they would pursue their objectives in the rest of Southeast Asia by all means short of open military intervention.

11. The Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State, the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Intelligence, Department of the Army, and the Director of Intelligence, USAF, believe that the condition of "decisive defeat of the field forces of the Viet Minh" prescribed for considering this problem would necessarily result in such a serious setback to Communist prestige, security, and expansionism as to lead to the following conclusions. In weighing the arguments presented in paragraphs 8 and 9, the Communist leaders in both Peiping and Moscow would probably give greatest consideration to: (a) the loss of prestige, the threat to Bloc security, and the setback to Communist expansionism in Southeast Asia involved in a decisive defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces and, (b) the risk of direct US action against Communist China. To the Communists, the consequences of the decisive defeat of the Viet Minh armed forces would be both certain and far reaching. In appraising the possible nature and scale of direct US action against the China mainland, the Communists would weigh any US warnings of probable consequences of intervention, the temper of US and free world opinion, and the probable US desire not to expand a local action. It is unlikely that the Communists' appraisal would lead them to the conviction that the US reaction to their intervention in Indochina would take the form of extensive and intense warfare against Communist China. In any case, their overriding suspicion of the ultimate motive of US forces in strength on or near the borders of Communist China would strongly influence their courses of action. Thus, the thought foremost in their minds would most probably be that failure to dislodge US military forces from the Chinese border would lead to increasing challenges to Communist power elsewhere. We

therefore believe that the chances are probably better than even that the Communists would accept the risk involved and that the

Chinese Communists would intervene openly and in force in an effort to save the Communist position in Indochina.

SUMMARY

The United States decision to provide military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was reached informally in February/March 1950, funded by the President on May 1, 1950, and was announced on May 8 of that year. The decision was taken in spite of the U.S. desire to avoid direct involvement in a colonial war, and in spite of a sensing that France's political-military situation in Indochina was bad and was deteriorating. Moreover, predictions that U.S. aid would achieve a marked difference in the course of the Indochina War were heavily qualified.

The situation in which the decision was made was completely dominated by the take-over of and consolidation of power in China by the communists. Nationalist Chinese forces had been withdrawn from mainland China and Communist Chinese troops had arrived on the border of Indochina in late 1949. This period was the high water mark of U.S. fears of direct Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina. NIE 5 of 29 December 1950 stated: "Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time... it is almost certain to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to maintain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh." *So help France, - ensure Chinese victory!*

The rationale of the decision was provided by the U.S. view that the Soviet-controlled expansion of communism both in Asia and in Europe required, in the interests of U.S. national security, a counter in Indochina. The domino thesis was quite prominent. On 6 March 1950, the Secretary of Defense wrote the President as follows: "The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal government in Indochina or to face the extension of communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." Despite this statement, it was a generally accepted proposition that "regardless of current U.S. commitments for certain military assistance to China, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances."

The decision to begin military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was not made under the illusion of great expectations. In April 1950, the Joint Chiefs would go no further than to say that prompt delivery of the aid would do no more than create the "possibility of success." In July 1950, General Erskine, after completing his Presidential mission to Indochina, reported that "the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation." All U.S. expectations seemed to have been underpinned by the

Joint Chiefs' belief that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China." .?

Results of the decision were mixed. Although implementation of the decision was partially successful in that it enabled the French to continue the military campaign in Indochina to the time of the Geneva Accords, military assistance was by and large a failure as an instrument of U.S. policy: the U.S. neither assured the French a military success, influenced the political situation to advantage, nor prevented the loss of North Vietnam to the communists at Geneva. Out, 300?

The U.S. MAAG Indochina was unable to perform even the limited functions assigned it. The French, never eager for U.S. advice, succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense.

Contributing to the initial U.S. decision to aid the French, and to limiting the effectiveness of the U.S. program of assistance, were (1) setting impracticable preconditions for assistance upon the French, (2) the U.S. proclivity to accept a slender chance of success without weighing alternatives, (3) the suppression of alternatives leading to decisional circularity and reinforcement of existing policies, (4) repeated failures of the U.S. to bargain effectively with the French, and (5) the vulnerability of the U.S. policy-making machinery to spoofing, particularly as regards U.S. credulity in accepting French information at face value and in being susceptible to "red" scares.

The decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States is the focus of this discussion; it was but one issue among hundreds pre-occupying the United States Government in the time period under consideration -- the fall of China and the Korean War -- and it was probably not regarded by those who made policy as among their critical decisions. There is no evidence of any high U.S. official arguing that any significant commitment threshold was being crossed. There were, however, those who maintained that the important anti-colonial stand of the U.S. was being undermined. These voices (and they were basically from the public domain) were drowned out by those who advocated immediate security needs. The importance of the decision was that when the U.S. was faced with an unambiguous choice between a policy of anti-colonialism and a policy of anti-communism, it chose the latter. And, although the decision was not perceived as getting the U.S. more deeply "involved" in Indochina, it did mark a tangible first step in that direction.

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1. Introduction: The U.S. and the French Colonial War

Because the early phase (1946-1949) of the Indochina war was an overt attempt by the French to reassert authority and control over their Indochinese colonies, the United States, although aware that European Recovery Program (ERP) funds were indirectly used to finance the war, refused to support that war directly. However, American actions taken to assure a neutral position -- refusal to sell armaments to the French for use in Indochina; refusal to transport troops, arms, or ammunition "to or from Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina" 1/ -- accompanied by public and private statements of anti-colonialist sentiments, did constitute, at least in French eyes, a policy hostile to the French interest in Indochina. 2/ Therefore, early in 1947, the Department of State attempted to reassure the French Government, and to make U.S. policies and actions more palatable to them:

"...In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area...." 3/

Neither direct nor indirect assistance to the French effort in Indochina was deemed "appropriate," however, until the French took concrete steps to grant autonomy to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The U.S. was prepared to support the "Bao Dai solution" for Vietnam when and if Bao Dai acquired genuine independence. The U.S. warned France against settling for a "native government [headed by Bao Dai] which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually [a] puppet government, separated from [the] people and existing only by [the] presence [of] French military forces." 4/

why?
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In March, 1949, in the so-called Elysee Agreement, France contracted with Bao Dai to grant "independence within the French Union" to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. 5/ Despite U.S. urgings, the Elysee Agreement remained a potentially empty and ill-defined French promise for eleven months. In that period, the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek were driven from the China mainland, and in November, Mao's legions arrived at the Indochina border. In January, 1950, Ho Chi Minh declared that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnamese people" and indicated his willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." 6/

The Communist Chinese promptly responded with recognition, followed by the Soviets. In France, there was a sharp debate in the National Assembly between Leftist advocates of an immediate truce with the Viet Minh, and Government supporters of ratification for the Elysee Agreement. On 2 February 1950, the French Government prevailed, and the Elysee Agreement was formally ratified. Under the circumstances, the United States determined that this action met its minimum requirements for tangible French progress towards Vietnamese autonomy. On 3 February, President Truman approved recognition of the States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. 7/ Within three months the United States decided to extend economic and military aid to the new States. On 8 May 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

"The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." 8/

The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war originated with its decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States, and to form MAAG Indochina. Therefore, it is of particular importance to understand the reasons for the decision, the form of its execution, and its effects.

2. The Containment of Communism

U.S. chagrin and increasing concern over the post-World War II expansion of the Soviet Union in Europe, together with fear of further gains by communism, set the tone of U.S. policy toward Asian communist nations in the 1948-1950 period. As the Secretary of State's statement above indicates, these were the days of the "monolithic Communist bloc," dominated by the Soviet Union. A National Security Council policy paper of 1949 stated that:

"The USSR is now an Asiatic power of the first magnitude with expanding influence and interest extending throughout continental Asia and into the Pacific. Since the defeat of Japan...the Soviet Union has been able to consolidate its strategic position until the base of Soviet power in Asia comprises not only the Soviet Far East, but also China north of the Great Wall, Northern Korea, Sakhalin, and the Kuriles." 9/

The question of how best to oppose the expansion of communism in Asia was raised to crisis proportions by the "loss" of China. An extensive and acrimonious national debate on foreign policy was stirred, conducted in the midst of growing public apprehension over communist penetration, espionage, and subversion in Europe and within the United

advocated increased aid to the Chinese Nationalists, who were regarded by many, even at this late date, as the bulwark containing communism in Asia. 10/ Although no major emphasis was given Indochina in 1949, NSC papers did discuss the importance of the Franco-Viet Minh struggle, and link the future of Indochina with that of the rest of the world:

"In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of Southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire Southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of Southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us: if Southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia." 11/

It was precisely the extension of communist authority over China referred to above that led to increased emphasis in U.S. policy on Indochina in late 1949 and 1950.

Following the Chinese Communist victories of 1949 and the movement of Chinese Communist troops to the border of Indochina in November of that year, NSC 64 (February 7, 1950) concluded that "the Departments of State and Defense should prepare, as a matter of priority, a program of all practicable measures designed to protect U.S. security interests in Indochina." 12/ On the same day, 13/ following the Communist Chinese (January 18) and the Soviet (January 30) recognition of the Ho Chi Minh regime, 14/ the United States announced its recognition of the Bao Dai Government. Theretofore, the U.S. had remained neutral, hesitating to choose between supporting France, a friendly colonial power engaged in re-establishing its authority, or supporting the Viet Minh, a communist-dominated independence movement in opposition to that European ally. This dilemma had been resolved by the victory of the Chinese Communists over the Nationalists, and by the threat posed to Indochina. The United States policy of support for the French and the Associated States was adjudged one befitting an anti-colonial democracy: support of nationalism and independence; opposition to attempted encroachments thereon by international communism.

3. "The Line of Containment" and "The Domino Theory"

The logic of this shift in U.S. policy is found not only in the direct threat to Southeast Asia posed by Communist China (and the Soviet Union), but also in the broader strategic concept of a line of containment, and in the early articulation of what later became known as the

"domino theory." Discussion of the line of containment centered about where that line was to be drawn: Indochina, and, later, Korea, fell on the free side of that line. 15/ The domino notion had been advanced by General Claire Chennault, among others, in the reference to Nationalist China 16/; the domino theory as applied to Indochina reinforced the decision of where to draw the line of containment. Both ideas were embodied by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a 1950 memorandum to the Secretary of Defense evaluating "the strategic importance, from the military point of view, of Southeast Asia":

"c. Southeast Asia is a vital segment in the line of containment of Communism stretching from Japan southward and around to the Indian Peninsula... The security of the three major non-Communist base areas in this quarter of the world -- Japan, India, and Australia -- depends in a large measure on the denial of Southeast Asia to the Communists. If Southeast Asia is lost, these three base areas will tend to be isolated from one another;

"d. The fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia...

"e. The fall of Southeast Asia would result in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia...

"f. ... Soviet control of all the major components of Asia's war potential might become a decisive factor affecting the balance of power between the United States and the USSR...

"g. A Soviet position of dominance over the Far East would also threaten the United States position in Japan... The feasibility of retention by the United States of its offshore island bases could thus be jeopardized." 17/

This theory, whether more or less completely articulated, appears in the relevant NSC papers of the Indochina War period, and underlies all major U.S. policy decisions taken relevant to the area. 18/

4. U.S. Perception of the Chinese Communist Threat

In the words of NSC 64 (February, 1950), "The presence of Chinese Communist troops along the border of Indochina makes it possible for arms, material and troops to move freely from Communist China to the northern Tonkin area now controlled by Ho Chi Minh. There is already evidence of movement of arms." 19/ NIE 5 maintained somewhat later, as the decision to help the French was being re-examined, that: "The Communist Chinese regime is already furnishing the Viet Minh materiel, training, and technical assistance. Official French sources report that Chinese Communist troops are already present in Tonkin in some strength... 20/ Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time... It is almost certain

to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to attain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh." 21/ NIE 5 appeared on December 29, 1950.

Although the threat of intervention to be expected from Communist China did not again reach this intensity or certainty during the remainder of the war -- the estimated probability of intervention declined consistently after the publication of NIE 5 -- estimates throughout the period indicate continuing Communist Chinese provision of military arms, materiel, and training to the Viet Minh, and the existence of Communist Chinese potential for direct intervention. No direct reference was made to possible Viet Minh resentment toward, or resistance to, direct Chinese intervention.

In sum, the U.S. perceived a major Chinese threat at the time the decision to support France and the Associated States was made; a high probability was assigned direct Chinese Communist intervention at the time this decision was being confirmed; this assigned probability declined rapidly, and it remained low through the post-Korean war period. It was believed that the Chinese were providing assistance to the Viet Minh throughout the period late 1949-1954.

5. U.S. Perceptions of the Situation within Vietnam

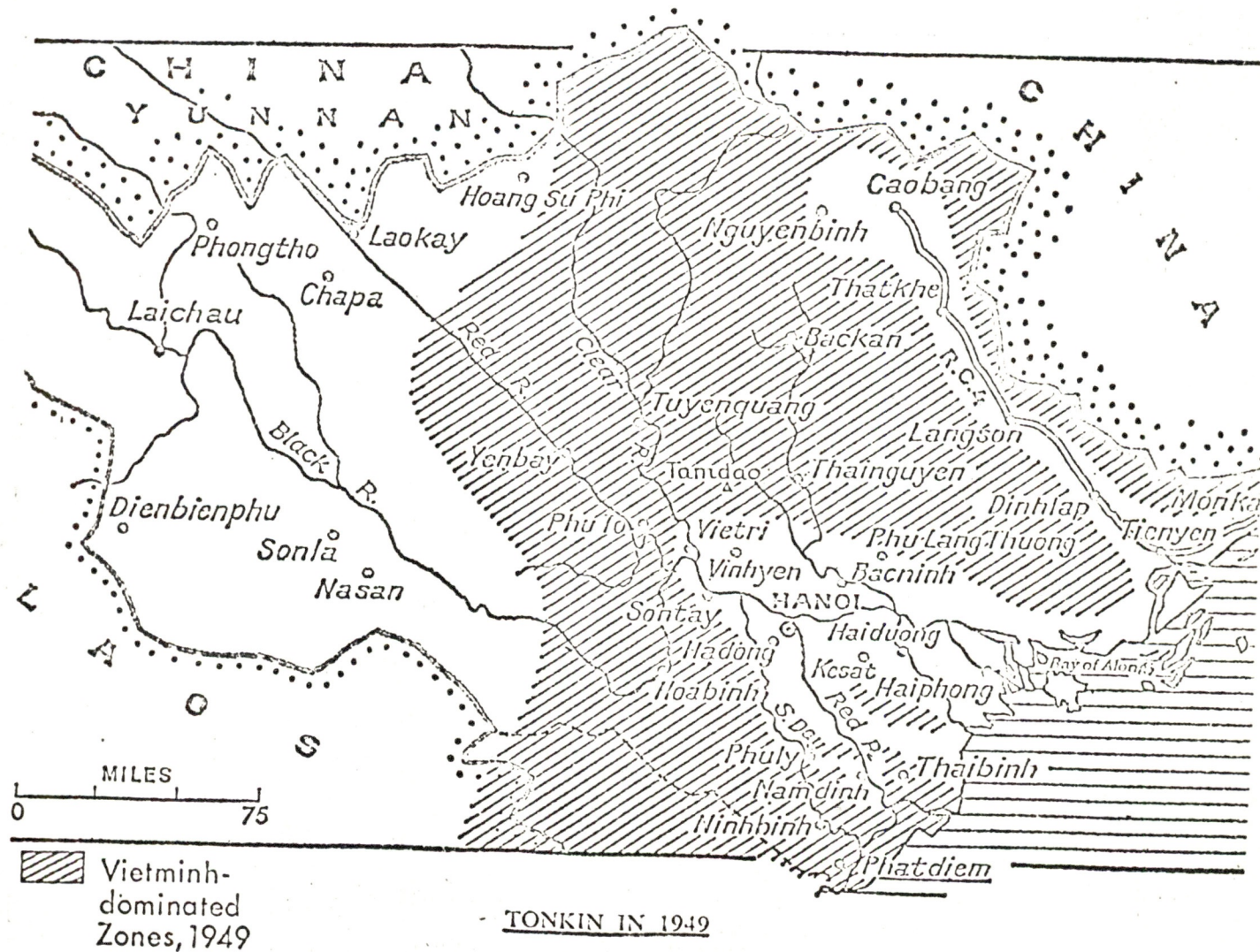
On April 5, 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring to intelligence estimates, indicated to the Secretary of Defense their view that "the situation in Southeast Asia has deteriorated," and that, further, "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." 22/ (The implication that U.S. assistance would result in improvement over and above the present situation cannot be detected in this carefully worded statement.) The Joint Chiefs of Staff went on to state that: "In general, the basic conditions of political and economic stability in this area, as well as the military and internal security conditions, are unsatisfactory. These factors are closely interrelated, and it is probable that, from the long-term point of view, political and economic stability is the controlling factor. On the other hand, the military situation in some areas, particularly Indochina, is of pressing urgency."

NIE 5 was the over-all U.S. assessment of the situation in Vietnam closest in time to the U.S. decision to support the French and the Associated States. It estimated the French position as "critically endangered by the Viet Minh," and as "precarious." 23/ Combining the more detailed estimates of this document with statements and estimates contained in other U.S. documents contemporary with NIE 5, the following picture emerges:

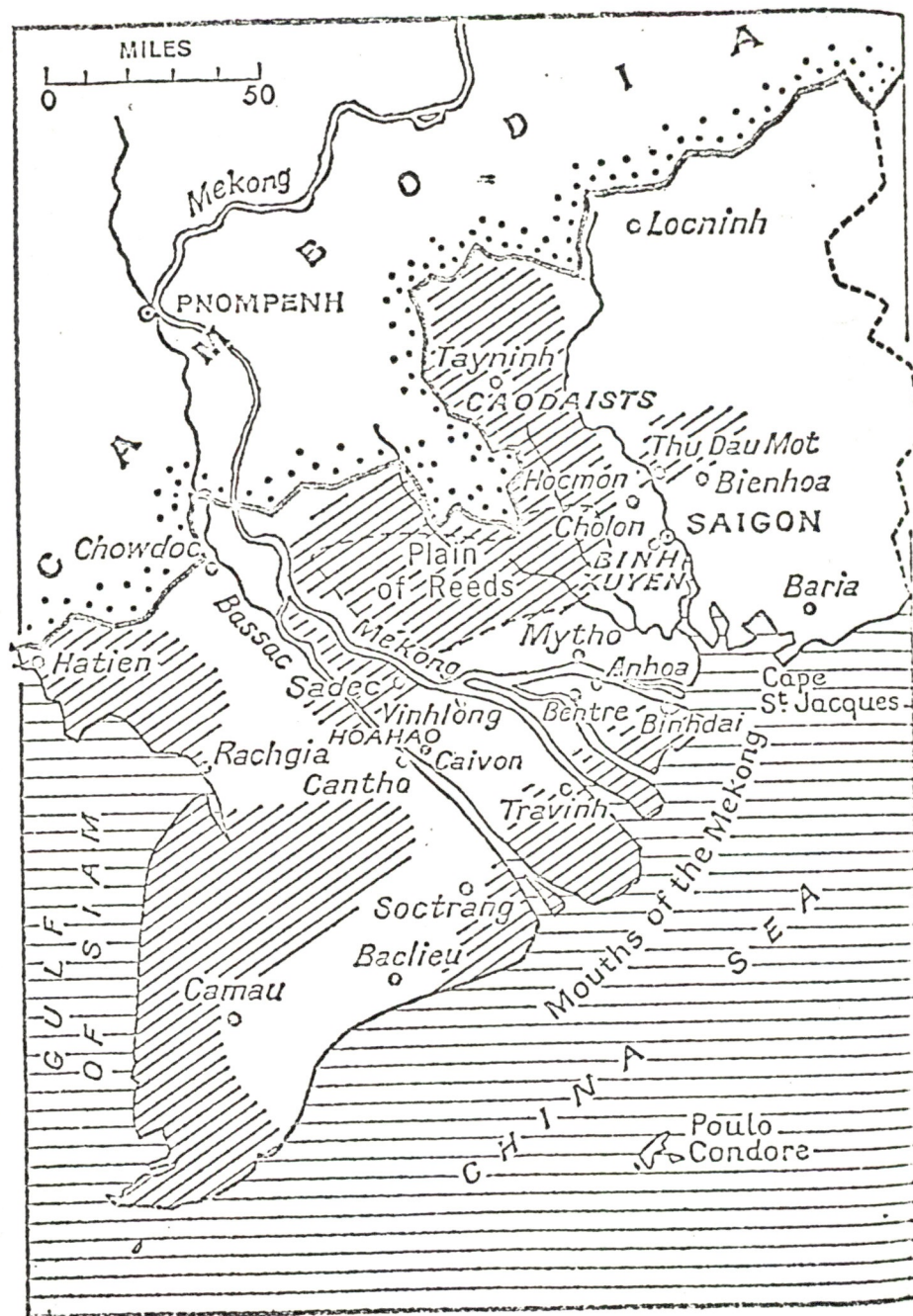
a. The Military Situation

(1) French-Viet Minh areas of control - see maps





Source: L. Bodard, The Quicksand War (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), 22



COCHINCHINA IN 1949

 Vietminh-dominated Zones, 1949

Source: L. Bodard,
The Quicksand War
 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
 1967), 30.

DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES IN INDOCHINA

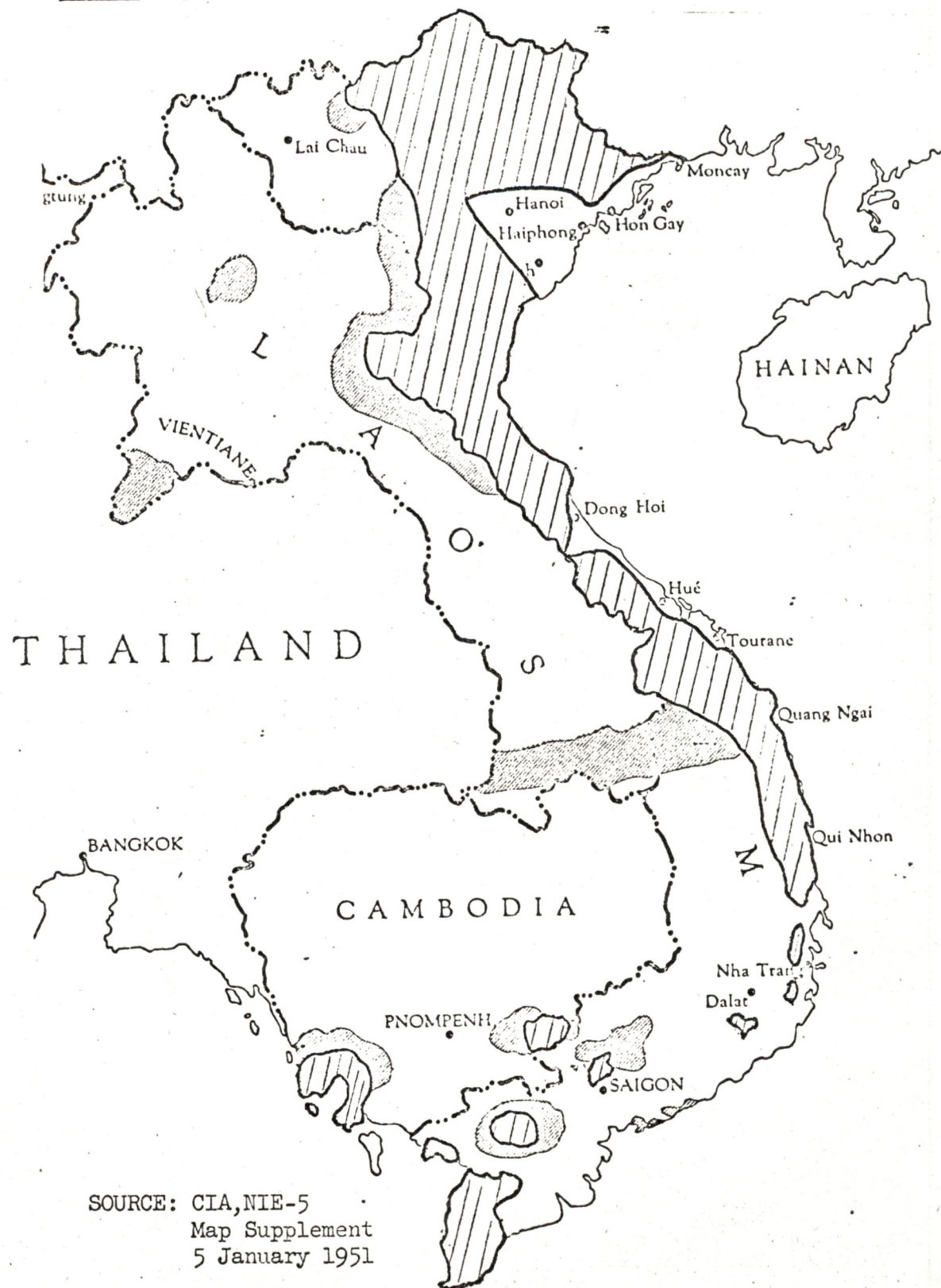
(3 November 1950)



Areas in which Communist-led rebels are challenging government authority.

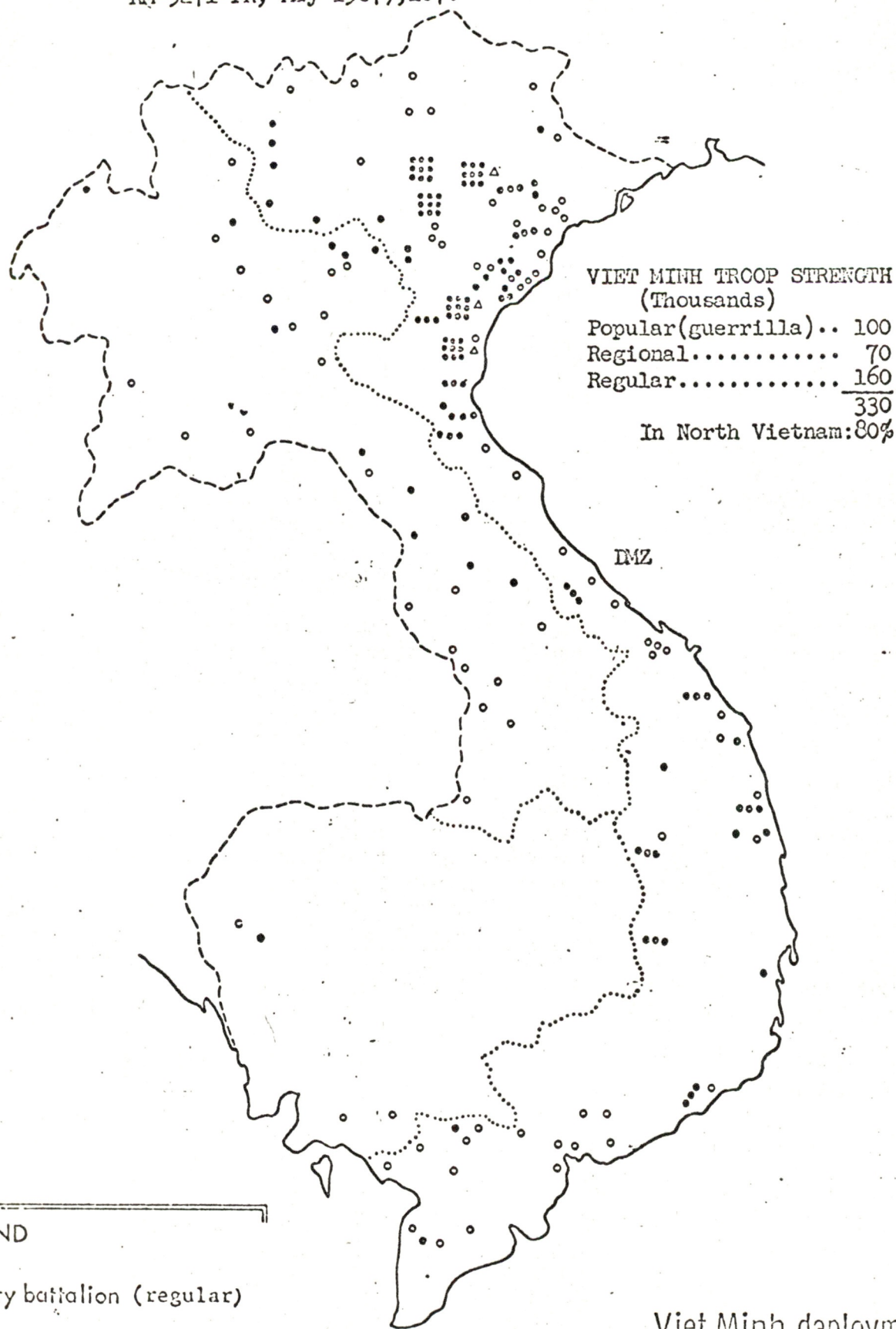


Areas in which Communist-instigated guerrilla attacks have recently occurred.



SOURCE: CIA, NIE-5
Map Supplement
5 January 1951

Source: V.J.Croizat, trans., A Translation from the French:
 Lessons of the War in Indochina (Santa Monica: RAND Corp.,
 RM-5271-PR, May 1967), 107.



Viet Minh deployment
September 30, 1953

- (2) Force ratio - French between 1.5 and 1.6 to 1 Viet Minh; vis-a-vis regular forces in the Tonkin Delta, the ratio was reversed - approximately 1.15 Viet Minh to 1 French (NIE 5).
- (3) Equipment status - French superiority, but Viet Minh improving due to Chinese aid.
- (4) Mobility - Viet Minh superior; French roadbound.
- (5) Strategy - French strategy lacking in aggressiveness, defensive, of doubtful value.
- (6) Status of Vietnamese National Army - essentially none; "only a slight chance that the French can maintain their military position long enough" 24/ to build such an army.
- (7) Relative capabilities - danger of a major military defeat of the French by the Viet Minh in Tonkin within six to nine months, which would jeopardize the French position in the remainder of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

b. The Economic and Political Situation

French resources badly strained; little or no real nationalist Vietnamese leadership, government; little popular support of Bao Dai regime 25/; political and economic situation generally poor.

c. French Objectives in Vietnam

French slowness and obstructionism over the years in creating a Vietnamese national government and national army (March 8, 1949, agreements were not ratified by France until February 2, 1950), and continued slowness in giving control of the bureaucracy to the Vietnamese, indicate a reluctant departure, if any departure, from colonial objectives.

d. French Resolve to Remain in Vietnam

"... there are grounds for questioning the French will to remain in Indochina." 26/

Thus, the American perception of the situation in Vietnam in 1950 was generally one of gloom, with little light at the end of the tunnel; in retrospect, it seems reasonably accurate.

6. The Decision to Assist France and the Associated States

a. French Request Aid

United States involvement in the bleak Indochinese situation was hastened when, on February 16, 1950, the French requested U.S. military

and economic assistance for the prosecution of the Indochinese war. The French forwarded their request after deciding "to set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina..."

"... the truth of the matter was that the effort in Indochina was such of a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise ... it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina ... looking into the future it was obvious ... that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about... In any event the French Government was confronted with necessity of reducing the present French forces in Indochina by at least 25,000 not only for budgetary reasons, but because additional men were urgently needed in connection with French national military program." 27/

Yet this appeal for aid, its thinly-veiled reinforcing arguments referring to withdrawal and the defense of Europe (on the day following the severing of U.S.-Bulgarian relations), was unaccompanied by a willingness to satisfy a U.S. request for France to announce the "evolutionary nature" of the governments of the Associated States, or to clarify otherwise the French intentions toward Indochina.

On February 27, a Department of State report on the position of the United States with respect to Indochina was submitted for the NSC's consideration. Issued on February 27 as NSC 64, the report concluded that:

"10. It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"11. The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

"12. Accordingly, the Departments of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina." 28/

To "facilitate" Department of Defense consideration of NSC 64, then Deputy Under Secretary of State Dean Rusk provided Major General James H. Burns of OSD a brief statement of Department of State policy in Indochina and Southeast Asia:

"The Department of State believes that within the limitations imposed by existing commitments and strategic priorities, the resources of the United States should be deployed to reserve Indochina and Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. The Department of State has accordingly already engaged all its political resources to the end that this object be secured. The Department is now engaged in the process of urgently examining what additional economic resources can effectively be engaged in the same operation.

"It is now, in the opinion of the Department, a matter of the greatest urgency that the Department of Defense assess the strategic aspects of the situation and consider, from the military point of view, how the United States can best contribute to the prevention of further Communist encroachment in that area." 29/

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In a memorandum for the President of March 6, 1950, the Secretary of Defense described U.S. options as follows:

"The French are irrevocably committed in Indochina and are supporting the three states as a move aimed at achieving non-Communist political stability... The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." 30/

b. The Griffin Mission

While the choice among alternatives awaited provision of the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military departments, 31/ the Secretary of State sent to the Far East "the Griffin Mission," which was given the task of surveying "the kinds and approximate value of assistance needed" 32/ in Indochina (among other countries). Departing when it did, some five months following the fall of Nationalist China, and headed by the former Deputy Chief of the Aid Mission to Mainland China, the Griffin Mission was probably intended to avoid further attacks on the State Department's Asia policy as well as to determine how U.S. economic resources might effectively be employed in Southeast Asia.

On March 22, the Griffin Mission report recommended U.S. aid for a program of rural rehabilitation, the provision of limited amounts of commodities and industrial equipment, and a program of technical assistance. These measures were estimated to cost \$23.5 million for the period through June, 1951. The mission also recommended the "psychological shock of ships with military aid material in the immediate future" 33/ as a measure to dramatize the U.S. commitment to those on the scene.

c. JCS Views

On April 5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to a request by the Secretary of Defense with recommendations for measures which, from

the United States military point of view, might prevent communist expansion in Southeast Asia. 34/ The six most important points made by the Chiefs are these:

(1) A recommendation for early implementation of military aid programs for Indochina and the other states of Southeast Asia, with funds already allocated to the states of Southeast Asia, to be delivered at the earliest practicable date and to be augmented as a matter of urgency with funds from the unallocated portion of the President's emergency fund. For the next fiscal year, an estimated \$100 million will be required for the military portion of this program.

(2) "In view of the history of military aid in China, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urge that these aid programs be subject, in any event, to the following conditions:

"a. That United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs; and

"b. That requests for military equipment be screened first by an officer designated by the Department of Defense and on duty in the recipient state. These requests should be subject to his determination as to the feasibility and satisfactory coordination of specific military operations. It should be understood that military aid will only be considered in connection with such coordinated operational plans as are approved by the representative of the Department of Defense on duty in the recipient country. Further, in conformity with current procedures, the final approval of all programs for military materiel will be subject to the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

(3) "Formation of a Southeast Asia Aid Committee is recommended.

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(4) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize the political implications involved in military aid to Indochina. It must be appreciated, however, that French armed forces ... are in the field and that if these were to be withdrawn this year because of political considerations, the Bao Dai regime probably could not survive even with United States aid. If the United States were now to insist upon independence for Vietnam and a phased French withdrawal from that country, this might improve the political situation. The French could be expected to interpose objections to, and certainly delays in such a program. Conditions in Indochina, however, are unstable and the situation is apparently deteriorating rapidly so that the urgent need for at least an initial increment of military and economic aid is psychologically overriding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, recommend the provision of military aid to Indochina at the earliest practicable date under a program to implement the President's action approving the allocation of \$15 million for Indochina and that corresponding increments of political and economic aid be programmed on an interim basis without prejudice to the pattern of the policy for additional military, political and economic aid that may be developed later."

(5) "... the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the immediate establishment of a small United States military aid group in Indochina... The Joint Chiefs of Staff would expect the senior member of this group to sit in consultation with military representatives of France and Vietnam and possibly of Laos and Cambodia. In addition to screening requests for materiel, he would be expected to insure full coordination of military plans and efforts between the French and Vietnamese forces and to supervise the allocation of materiel."

(6) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe in the possibility of success of a prompt coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid to Southeast Asia and feel that such a success might well lead to the gaining of the initiative in the struggle in that general area."

The last of these points is clearly fundamental to the undertaking of any program of assistance; yet in the Chiefs' memorandum it appears only as the concluding portion of the paragraph (paragraph 15) recommending establishment of a military aid group in Indochina, and is subsequently subjected to the qualification that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China."

More remarkable, however, is the rarity with which even such equivocal predictions of success appear in the available documents relating directly to the decision to provide assistance to Indochina. Direct statements on the probable effectiveness of such United States programs of the period are typically absent; indirect statements are typically of the implied-imperative ("we must do X if Asia is to be saved"), or the negative-imperative (if we do not do X, Asia will be lost"). There was no assurance of military success given; and the calculus of the decision-making process relating to the weighing of the probability of success against the costs of failure of U.S. programs in the 1950 period is not evident, unfortunately, in available documents.

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d. Presidential Approval

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved the allocation of \$10 million to the Department of Defense to cover the early shipment of urgently needed military assistance items to Indochina, 35/ thus taking the first crucial decision regarding U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. On May 8, the Secretary of State, in a statement at the ministerial level meeting in Paris, announced United States assistance to the Associated States and France. And on May 24, the governments of France and the Associated States were notified of the United States intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States, thus marking the implementation of the recommendations of the Griffin Mission. .

On June 27, 1950, President Truman, in announcing the onset of the Korean war, also stated that he had "directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close

working relations with those forces." 36/ The concept of a military assistance advisory group had also been approved, although the President did not refer to MAAG in his public statement. 37/ Also, in June, following the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee was established.

e. Erskine Mission

The military mission dispatched by the President and headed by Major General Graves B. Erskine, USMC, arrived in Saigon on July 15, and reported its findings on August 5. General Erskine reported that a permanent solution of the Indochina crisis went beyond military action alone, the core of the problem being a deep-seated hatred and distrust of the French by the population that precluded their cooperation in the prosecution of the war. The mission also reported that the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation. 38/

The first elements of the U.S. MAAG were assigned to Indochina on August 3, 1950; Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, USA, assumed command as the first Chief of MAAG on October 10. The mission of the MAAG was limited to provision of material assistance to the French forces and indirect provision of military aid to the forces of the Associated States; General Brink was directed not to assume any training or advisory responsibilities toward the indigenous armies. But from the outset, the French rigorously limited end-use inspections of MAAG to a small number of carefully prescribed visits. 39/

f. JCS Reevaluation

After the initial decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States had been taken, the formation of an economic mission had been announced, the first shipment of arms and equipment had arrived in Indochina, and the MAAG had been approved and was in the process of formation, concern mounted over the soundness of these moves. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were again asked by the Secretary of Defense to formulate a position on future U.S. actions with respect to Indochina, and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee (SEAAPC) published, on October 11, 1950, a draft "Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy on Indochina." The SEAAPC statement proposed adding another dimension to U.S. assistance policy: "Regardless of current U.S. commitments for provision of certain military assistance to Indochina, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances." 40/ The paper also recommended that the U.S. support the "prompt acceleration of the formation of new national armies of the three Associated States," and a covering memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense recommended that if negotiations were conducted with the French, U.S. representatives should:

"... secure French acceptance of the following conditions, which shall attach to the extension of U.S. assistance in the

formation of national armies in Indochina: (1) French Union Forces would not be withdrawn from Indochina until such Associated States armies are fully trained and ready to act effectively in replacement; (2) France would not decrease its outlays for Indochina below the 1950 rate during the period of the American military aid requested; (3) the national armies project would have the approval of the three Associated States governments; (4) the High Commissioner for Indochina, the French Command, and the three Associated States would maintain full consultative relations with the Legation and MAAG during the period of the formation of the armies."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reevaluation appeared on October 27: military aid should be continued on an expedited basis. Again the judgment was offered that genuine autonomy and self-government had to be extended to the people of Indochina to ameliorate the basic cause of the deterioration of security in Indochina: lack of popular support for the authorities. 41/ But the most clearly articulated and complete expression of the Joint Chiefs' over-all position at year end is found in NSC 64/1, 42/ a November 28 paper by the Chiefs which takes account of a report from General Brink 43/ and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee's draft of October 11; in fact, this statement of short- and long-run objectives contained in NSC 64/1 was to remain the basis of United States policy toward Indochina for the duration of the French-Indochina war.

"SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

"a. The United States should take action, as a matter of urgency, by all means practicable short of the actual employment of United States military forces, to deny Indochina to Communism.

"b. As long as the present situation exists, the United States should continue to insure that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French. - 64/1

"c. The United States should seek to develop its military assistance program for Indochina based on an over-all military plan prepared by the French, concurred in by the Associated States of Indochina, and acceptable to the United States.

"(1) Both the plan and the program should be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency. It should be clearly understood, however, that United States acceptance of the plan is limited to the logistical support which the United States may agree to furnish. The aid provided under the program should be furnished to the French in Indochina and to the Associated States. The allocation of United States military assistance as between the French and the national armies of Indochina should be approved by the French and United States authorities in Indochina.

"(2) Popular support of the Government by the Indochinese people is essential to a favorable settlement of the security problem of Indochina. Therefore, as a condition to the provision of those further increases in military assistance to Indochina necessary for the implementation of an agreed over-all military plan, the United States Government should obtain assurances from the French Government that:

"(a) A program providing for the eventual self-government of Indochina either within or outside of the French Union will be developed, made public, and implementation initiated at once in order to strengthen the national spirit of the Indochinese in opposition to Communism.

"(b) National armies of the Associated States of Indochina will be organized as a matter of urgency. While it is doubtful that the buildup of these armies can be accomplished in time to contribute significantly to the present military situation, the direct political and psycho-logical benefits to be derived from this course would be great and would thus result in immediate, although indirect, military benefits.

"(c) Pending the formation and training of Indochinese national armies as effective units, and as an interim emergency measure, France will dispatch sufficient additional armed forces to Indochina to insure that the restoration of peace and internal security in that country will be accomplished in accordance with the timetable of the over-all military plan for Indochina.

"(d) France will change its political and military concepts in Indochina to:

i. Eliminate its policy of
'colonialism.'

ii. Provide proper tutelage to
the Associated States.

iii. Insure that a suitable military command structure, unhampered by political interference, is established to conduct effective and appropriate military operations...

"(3) At an appropriate time the United States should institute checks to satisfy itself that the conditions set forth in subparagraph c.(2) above are being fulfilled.

d. The United States should exert all practicable political and diplomatic measures required to obtain the

recognition of the Associated States by the other non-Communist states of Southeast and South Asia.

"e. In the event of overt attack by organized Chinese Communist forces against Indochina, the United States should not permit itself to become engaged in a general war with Communist China but should, in concert with the United Kingdom, support France and the Associated States by all means short of the actual employment of United States military forces. This support should include appropriate expansion of the present military assistance program and endeavors to induce States in the neighborhood of Indochina to commit armed forces to resist the aggression.

"f. The United States should immediately reconsider its policy toward Indochina whenever it appears that the French Government may abandon its military position in that country or plans to refer the problem of Indochina to the United Nations. Unless the situation throughout the world generally, and Indochina specifically, changes materially, the United States should seek to dissuade the French from referring the Indochina question to the United Nations.

"g. Inasmuch as the United States-sponsored resolution, 'Uniting for Peace,' has been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and should a situation develop in Indochina in a manner similar to that in Korea in which United Nations forces were required, the United States would then probably be morally obligated to contribute its armed forces designated for service on behalf of the United Nations. It is, therefore, in the interests of the United States to take such action in Indochina as would forestall the need for the General Assembly to invoke the provisions of the resolution, 'Uniting for Peace.' ..."

The JCS also proposed long-term objectives, urging the development of an underground guerrilla warfare capability, a psychological warfare program ("to demonstrate the evils of Communism....and to warn...of renewed Chinese imperialism"), and encouragement of an appropriate regional security arrangement. These concepts formed the heart of an NSC Staff Study of December 28. 44/ The initial decision to give assistance was confirmed after nearly one year's continual re-examination, and remained basic to U.S. policy for the remainder of the war.

7. MAP for Indochina

a. Magnitude

The U.S. military assistance program to the French and Associated States was implemented rapidly, considering the major U.S.

commitment to the Korean war. In a somewhat premature judgment of outcomes, a progress report on the implementation of NSC 64 (March 15, 1951) stated that "American military aid furnished the States' forces and the Army of the French Union may have been the decisive factor in the preservation of the area against Communist aggression." ^{45/} Through 1952 and into 1954 the MDAP shipments to Indochina increased steadily ^{46/}: by February 3, 1953, the United States had shipped 137,200 long tons of material (224 ships' cargoes); by July 1954, approximately 150,000 long tons had been sent, including 1,800 combat vehicles, 30,887 motor transport vehicles, 361,522 small arms and machine guns, 438 naval craft, 2 World War II aircraft carriers, and about 500 aircraft. By the conclusion of the Geneva agreements in July, 1954, the U.S. had delivered aid to Indochina at an original cost of \$2,600 million. ^{47/} Nonetheless, protests of the French at the slowness of deliveries and the "interference" of MAAG with French requests were recurrent, and peaked, during the crisis days of 1954. Yet these complaints probably reflected less genuine U.S. shortcomings than French resentment of American efforts to advise, screen, inspect, and verify, and sheer frustration. Moreover, the vagaries of the French logistic system not only made the MAAG job more difficult, but further impeded combat supplies.

b. Effectiveness

In spite of the conditions under which U.S. assistance to France and the Associated States was given, the MAAG during the period of the Indochina war was little more than a small (70 in 1950, ³⁴² in 1954) supply-support group which exerted far more influence upon U.S. decisions than on the French. The French, never eager for American advice, not only succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense, but in fact -- through adroit pressuring of officials above the MAAG -- sometimes reduced MAAG to the position of taking their military orders. Available data do not permit detailed evaluation of the efficiency of MAP, but it seems clear that French restrictions on the U.S. MAAG reduced it to virtual impotence. ^{48/}

However, to relate any judgment of the effectiveness of the United States assistance program simply and directly to the outcome of the war would clearly be inappropriate. For the most part, U.S. expectations were not high. In the words of the American Ambassador to France in February, 1950, "obviously any program of external assistance was marginal in character and entirely dependent for its success upon the solidity of the base -- in this case, the firmness of French policy and actions in Indochina." ^{49/} French determination to resist American advice was not matched by firmness in proceeding with granting independence to Vietnam, or otherwise meeting the political situation in Indochina. Hence, as the U.S. apparently expected, a favorable outcome to the Indochina war continued to elude France, even with American material and financial help. U.S. assistance enabled France to wage a military battle while it lost its political war -- in Saigon and in Paris. (The military defeat at Dien Bien Phu was important primarily from the point of view of its psychological and political impact on the French, and was so interpreted in the relevant U.S. intelligence estimates.) ^{50/}

If it would be an error to evaluate the effectiveness of the U.S. program in terms of war outcome, and if the efficiency of MAP and MAAG cannot meaningfully be analyzed, it remains to evaluate the degree to which France met the conditions under which assistance was tendered, which presumably impinged directly on U.S. political objectives:

- (1) The United States objective of insuring "that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French" was fulfilled; in fact, it was insisted on by the French. On the one hand, U.S. military forces were never directly engaged in the Indochina war. On the other hand, the French, in retaining this primary responsibility, preserved the prerogative to determine policy and the freedom to reject U.S. advice. U.S. "leverage" was minimal.
- (2) The condition of basing the assistance program on "an urgently prepared French plan acceptable to the Associated States and to the U.S." was frustrated in several ways. At the outset no overall plan was presented, and those portions of existing plans to which U.S. authorities were privy (e.g., 7. Alessandri's pacification plan for the Tonkin Delta) were not acceptable to U.S. thinking. Second, when the Letourneau-Allard and Navarre plans were finally prepared (in 1953, three years after the U.S. decided that a plan was a necessary precondition for aid), some U.S. observers realized that these were more concepts than plans. U.S. acceptance of the plans was more reluctant than the granting of \$385 million in additional assistance might indicate. 51/ Finally, the plans, once "accepted," were not vigorously carried out. 52/
- (3) The French met pro forma the condition that they provide the U.S. assurances that they would grant self-government for Indochina, and form national armies for the Associated States. But it was clear throughout the war that, regardless of the amounts of U.S. assistance rendered, France's declarations of intent were grudgingly issued, and were seldom followed by action. The French Indochina war had to be lost before Vietnam was granted genuine independence.
- (4) Although France did expand its forces in Indochina, these forces were never sufficient to the task. French draftees were never employed in Indochina. France

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continually pointed to its European defense posture in explanation. In at least one case, U.S. personnel were requested (e.g., as aircraft mechanics), and 200 were provided, when a pool of suitable personnel existed in Metropolitan France.

- (5) Statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the French did not ameliorate neo-mercantilism or other colonial policies, or provide "proper tutelage" to the Associated States; nor did it develop a command structure suitable to the United States.
- (6) The U.S. "checks to satisfy itself that the conditions" imposed were being satisfied, were, by and large, few and far between, and were conducted at the pleasure and within the specifications of the French.
- (7) The French chose not to refer Indochina to the United Nations. Certainly the U.S. assistance program bore on this decision; whether or not it was the deciding factor is unclear.

The effectiveness of the United States assistance program as an instrument of United States policy -- quite aside from the outcome of the war -- was thus quite low.

8. Critique

As earlier sections of this paper have suggested, the U.S. was persuaded to involve itself in the Indochina war by the perceived need, following the fall of Nationalist China, to hold a line against communists. This strategic drawing of the line at the Chinese-Indochina border was reinforced by the belief that the fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia, and that the fall of Southeast Asia would eventuate in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia. Prospects for a French victory in Indochina were assessed in contemporary U.S. intelligence documents as poor; nonetheless, the U.S. provided military and economic assistance to the French and the Associated States in the belief that a prompt, coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid offered some prospect that France might succeed in gaining the initiative in the struggle in that area. Six major points of critique of U.S. policy follow:

a. The U.S. Misestimated France

U.S. policymakers apparently realized that the conditions they imposed upon the French were impracticable to some degree. Nonetheless, they believed that pre-conditions were necessary and could assist

in convincing the French to mend their colonial ways and to pursue the war with American methods, diligence, and aggressiveness. The French, long noted for proficiency and precision in logic, required no Descartes to realize that the United States was thus asking France (1) to regain full responsibility for the Indochina War, and in particular for fighting and taking casualties in that war; (2) to follow the "guidance" and "advice" of the United States on the exercise of this French responsibility; and (3) having fought the war, presumably to a successful conclusion, to relinquish control over Indochina. In view of the French willingness to retain responsibility for the war, it is not surprising that they were reluctant, at best, to accept propositions (2) and (3). Despite French pronouncements on their role in fighting communism, there is little reason to believe that they regarded the Indochina war in the same light as the U.S. viewed the Korean War. Rather, their behavior resembled that of other colonial powers who had fought to retain profitable colonies.

b. Slim Chance Accepted by the U.S.

Had U.S. policymakers recognized the slimness of the chance of persuading France to accept the three propositions specified above, they might have sought alternative courses of action in Indochina. As it was, the possibility (as opposed to the probability) of success was their prime consideration, and, overestimating U.S. leverage for influencing a favorable outcome, alternatives were not considered.

c. Circular U.S. Policy

Suppression of alternatives, both on the general and the particular level (see Note 48 for an example of the latter), led to a circularity in and reinforcement of existing policies -- constant forced choices between "bad" and "worse." 53/

d. Poor Bargaining

Having taken a hard policy line toward the French, the United States failed to bargain effectively. Thus, in circumstances not totally dissimilar from those prevailing in Vietnam in subsequent time periods, the U.S. continued to provide assistance disregarding infractions of pre-conditions; moreover, the pre-conditions for aid were not modified. Without modification, the conditions became worse than meaningless: standing testaments to U.S. impotence, to be recognized only when and how the French chose. The U.S. became virtually a prisoner of its own policy. Containment of communism, concern for the French in relation to the postwar Europe of NATO, EDC, and the Soviet threat in the West, combined with a fear, based on World War II strategy, that a French withdrawal from Indochina would leave exposed the U.S. flank in Korea, all compelled the U.S. to continue aid. Yet none of these considerations should have precluded modification of the U.S. bargaining strategy.

e. Misinformation

The U.S. policymaking machinery was highly vulnerable to spoofing, on at least three counts: (1) the very strength of the U.S.

position regarding communism must have been a constant temptation, not always resisted, for other parties to cry "red" and thus to manipulate the U.S.; (2) dependence on official French sources for intelligence and other information was potentially misleading; (3) reliance on the high-level mission technique for gathering information to be used as a direct input to policy decisions proved unsatisfactory. 54/

f. Costs Not Weighed

Finally, there is little indication that U.S. policymakers, their thoughts dominated by the objective of containing the monolithic communist bloc, faced up to the costs of winning the Indochina war, even while direct U.S. intervention was being considered. 55/ Nor does the evidence suggest that consideration was given to the tangible and intangible costs of providing U.S. military assistance to a power losing a war, including the potential impact on the U.S. position in Asia. And, finally, available documents fail to reveal any consideration given to the notion of sunk costs. There were, of course, voices in the wilderness. An unsigned, undated memorandum posed eight key questions to be answered by the NSC during the spring of 1954. 56/ Comment on the following four questions, in relation to the time at which they were raised, is unnecessary:

- Just how important is Southeast Asia to the security interests of the U.S.? Is the analysis in NSC 5405 still valid? Is the area important enough to fight for?
- How important is Indochina in the defense of Southeast Asia? Is the "domino theory" valid? Is Indochina important enough to fight for? If not, what are the strategic consequences of the loss of all or part of Indochina?
- If the U.S. intervenes in Indochina, can we count on the support of the natives? Can we fight as allies of the French and avoid the stigma of colonialism?
- Is there a strategic concept for the conduct of a war in Indochina which offers promise of early success...?

The decision of the United States to provide assistance to France and the Associated States during the Indochina War is usually treated lightly, if at all, in current histories. Yet, both the taking of the decision and its implementation were significant for and remarkably similar to subsequent U.S. experiences in Vietnam.

II. A. UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

SUMMARY

It has been argued that even as the U.S. began supporting the French in Indochina, the U.S. missed opportunities to bring peace, stability and independence to Vietnam. The issues arise from the belief on the part of some critics that (a) the U.S. made no attempt to seek out and support a democratic-nationalist alternative in Vietnam; and (b) the U.S. commanded, but did not use, leverage to move the French toward granting genuine Vietnamese independence.

The record shows that through 1953, the French pursued a policy which was based on military victory and excluded meaningful negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. The French did, however, recognize the requirement for an alternative focus for Vietnamese nationalist aspirations, and from 1947 forward, advanced the "Bao Dai solution." The record shows that the U.S. was hesitant through 1949 to endorse the "Bao Dai solution" until Vietnam was in fact unified and granted autonomy and did consistently support the creation of a genuinely independent, non-communist Vietnamese government to supplant French rule. Nonetheless, the fall of China and the deteriorating French military position in Indochina caused both France and the U.S. to press the "Bao Dai solution." In early 1950, after French ratification of the Elysee Agreement granting "Vietnam's independence," the U.S. recognized Bao Dai and initiated military and economic aid, even before transfer of governmental power actually occurred. Thereafter, the French yielded control only pro forma, while the Emperor Bao Dai adopted a retiring, passive role, and turned his government over to discreditable politicians. The Bao Dai regime was neither popular nor efficient, and its army, dependent on French leadership, was powerless. The impotence of the Bao Dai regime, the lack of any perceptible alternatives (except for the communists), the fact of continued French authority and control over the GVN, the fact that the French alone seemed able to contain communism in Indochina -- all these constrained U.S. promptings for a democratic-nationalist government in Vietnam. (Tab 1)

The U.S.-French ties in Europe (NATO, Marshall Plan, Mutual Defense Assistance Program) only marginally strengthened U.S. urgings that France make concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. Any leverage from these sources was severely limited by the broader considerations of U.S. policy for the containment of communism in Europe and Asia. NATO and the Marshall Plan were of themselves judged to be essential to our European interests. To threaten France with economic and military sanctions in Europe in order to have it alter its policy in Indochina was, therefore, not plausible. Similarly, to reduce the level of

French = ARVN (after '63; London, Diem)

Bao Dai = GVN (after '63)

B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

military assistance to the French effort in Indochina would have been counter-productive, since it would have led to a further deterioration in the French military position there. In other words, there was a basic incompatibility in the two strands of U.S. policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the anti-communist war and win, preferably with U.S. guidance and advice; and (2) Washington expected the French, when battlefield victory was assured, to magnanimously withdraw from Indochina. For France, which was probably fighting more a colonial than an anti-communist war, and which had to consider the effects of withdrawal on colonial holdings in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, magnanimous withdrawal was not too likely.

France, having no such policy incompatibilities, could and did pursue a consistent course with the stronger bargaining hand. Thus, the French were able to resist pressures from Washington and through the MAAG in Saigon to create a truly Vietnamese army, to grant the Vietnamese more local autonomy and to wage the war more effectively. MAAG was relegated to a supply function and its occasional admonitions to the French were interpreted by them as interference in their internal affairs. Even though by 1954, the U.S. was financing 78% of the costs of the war, the French retained full control of the dispensation of military assistance and of the intelligence and planning aspects of the military struggle. The expectation of French victory over the Viet Minh encouraged the U.S. to "go along" with Paris until the conclusion of the war. Moreover, the U.S. was reluctant to antagonize the French because of the high priority given in Washington's planning to French participation in the European Defense Community. France, therefore, had considerable leverage and, unless the U.S. supported Paris on its own terms, the French could, and indeed did, threaten not to join the EDC and to stop fighting in Indochina. (Tab 2)

American thinking and policy-making was dominated by the tendency to view communism in monolithic terms. The Viet Minh was, therefore, seen as part of the Southeast Asia manifestation of the world-wide communist expansionary movement. French resistance to Ho Chi Minh, in turn, was thought to be a crucial link in the containment of communism. This strategic perception of the communist threat was supported by the espousal of the domino principle: the loss of a single nation in Southeast Asia to communism would inexorably lead to the other nations of the area falling under communist control. The domino principle, which probably had its origin at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China, was at the root of U.S. policy. Although elements of a domino-like theory could be found in NSC papers before the start of the Korean War, the Chinese intervention in Korea was thought to be an ominous confirmation of its validity. The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to that in Korea, was feared, especially after the armistice in Korea.

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B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

The Eisenhower Administration followed the basic policy of its predecessor, but also deepened the American commitment to containment in Asia. Secretary Dulles pursued a forthright, anti-communist policy and made it clear that he would not permit the "loss" of Indochina, in the manner the Democrats had allegedly allowed the "loss" of China. Dulles warned China not to intervene, and urged the French to drive toward a military victory. Dulles was opposed to a cease-fire and tried to dissuade the French from negotiations with the Viet Minh until they had markedly improved their bargaining position through action on the battlefield. The NSC in early 1954 was persuaded that a non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to the Viet Minh. In consequence of this more militant policy, the U.S. Government tended to focus on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. (Tab 3)

DISCUSSION

II. A. Tab 1 - U.S. Policy and the Bao Dai Regime

Tab 2 - Leverage: France Had More Than the United States

Tab 3 - Perceptions of the Communist Threat to Southeast Asia and to Basic U.S. Interests

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II

U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE

FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR

1950 - 1954

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN
THE FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR
1950-1954

Foreword

This portion of the study treats U.S. policy towards the war in Indochina from the U.S. decision to recognize the Vietnamese Nationalist regime of the Emperor Bao Dai in February, 1950, through the U.S. deliberations on military intervention in late 1953 and early 1954. Section A examines the triangular relationship of France, the U.S., and the Bao Dai regime. Section B analyzes the intervention issue, and the antecedents to the Geneva Conference.

- A. United States, France, and Vietnamese Nationalism
- B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

II. A. UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

SUMMARY

It has been argued that even as the U.S. began supporting the French in Indochina, the U.S. missed opportunities to bring peace, stability and independence to Vietnam. The issues arise from the belief on the part of some critics that (a) the U.S. made no attempt to seek out and support a democratic-nationalist alternative in Vietnam; and (b) the U.S. commanded, but did not use, leverage to move the French toward granting genuine Vietnamese independence.

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France, having no such policy incompatibilities, could and did pursue a consistent course with the stronger bargaining hand. Thus, the French were able to resist pressures from Washington and through the MAAG in Saigon to create a truly Vietnamese army, to grant the Vietnamese more local autonomy and to wage the war more effectively. MAAG was relegated to a supply function and its occasional admonitions to the French were interpreted by them as interference in their internal affairs. Even though by 1954, the U.S. was financing 78% of the costs of the war, the French retained full control of the dispensation of military assistance and of the intelligence and planning aspects of the military struggle. The expectation of French victory over the Viet Minh encouraged the U.S. to "go along" with Paris until the conclusion of the war. Moreover, the U.S. was reluctant to antagonize the French because of the high priority given in Washington's planning to French participation in the European Defense Community. France, therefore, had considerable leverage and, unless the U.S. supported Paris on its own terms, the French could, and indeed did, threaten not to join the EDC and to stop fighting in Indochina. (Tab 2)

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II. A. 1.

UNITED STATES POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

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II. A. 1. U.S. POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

1. The Bao Dai Solution

a. The French Predicament

French perceptions of the conflict which broke out in December, 1946, between their forces in Indochina and the Viet Minh forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) began to alternate between boundless optimism and unbridled gloom. In May, 1947, Minister of War Coste-Floret announced in Paris that: "There is no military problem any longer in Indochina...the success of French arms is complete." 1/ Within six months, though ambitious armored, amphibious, and airborne drives had plunged into the northern mountains and along the Annam coast, Viet Minh sabotage and raids along lines of communication had mounted steadily, and Paris had come to realize that France had lost the military initiative. In the meantime, the French launched political forays similarly ambitious and equally unproductive. Leon Pignon, political adviser to the French Commander in Indochina, and later High Commissioner, wrote in January, 1947, that:

"Our objective is clear: to transpose to the field of Vietnamese domestic politics the quarrel we have with the Viet Minh, and to involve ourselves as little as possible in the campaigns and reprisals which ought to be the work of the native adversaries of that party." 2/

Within a month, an emissary journeyed into the jungle to deliver to Ho Chi Minh's government demands tantamount to unconditional surrender. About the same time, French representatives approached Bao Dai, the former Emperor of Annam, with proposals that he undertake to form a Vietnamese government as an alternate to Ho Chi Minh's. Being unable to force a military resolution, and having foreclosed meaningful negotiations with Ho, the French turned to Bao Dai as their sole prospect for extrication from the growing dilemma in Vietnam.

b. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, 1948

Bao Dai's mandarin court in Hue, Annam, had been little more than an instrument of French colonial policy, and -- after the occupation by Japan -- of Japanese policy. Bao Dai had become Emperor at the age of 12, in 1925, but did not actually ascend the throne until 1932, after education in France. In August, 1945, when the Viet Minh arrived in Hue, he abdicated in favor of Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and accepted the post of "Supreme Adviser" to the new state. In 1946, he left Vietnam, and went to Hong Kong. There, he found himself solicited not only by French representatives, but by the DRV, who sought him to act on their behalf with the French.

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B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement

Bao Dai attempted at first to maintain a central position between the two protagonists, but was soon persuaded to decline the Viet Minh overtures by non-Communist nationalists. A group of these, including members of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dong Minh Hoi, Dai Vet, and the VNQDD formed a National Union, and declared support for Bao Dai. One authority termed the National Union "a fragile coalition of discredited collaborators, ambitious masters of intrigue, incompetent sectarians, and a smattering of honest leaders without a following." Among the latter were Ngo Dinh Diem, who "for the first and only time, joined a party of which he was not the founder," and pledged to back the Emperor so long as he pursued independence for Vietnam. ^{3/} Now, having eliminated the Viet Minh support option, Bao Dai became more compliant in his discussions with the French, and the French became correspondingly stiffer in their attitude toward the Viet Minh. Yet, little came of the talks. On December 7, 1947, aboard a French warship in Ha Long Bay, Bao Dai signed an accord with the French, committing the French to Vietnamese political independence so minimally that it was promptly condemned not only by Diem, but also by more opportunistic colleagues in the National Union. Bao Dai, in what might have been a political withdrawal, removed himself from the developing intrigue, and fled to European pleasure centers for a four month jaunt which earned him the sobriquet "night club emperor."

The French, despite lack of cooperation from their elusive Vietnamese principal, sent diplomats to pursue Bao Dai and publicized their resolve "to carry on, outside the Ho Chi Minh Government, all activities and negotiations necessary for the restoration of peace and freedom in the Vietnamese countries" -- in effect, committing themselves to military victory and Bao Dai. ^{4/} French persistence eventually persuaded Bao Dai to return to Hong Kong, to endorse the formation of a Vietnamese national government prior to independence, and finally, to return to Vietnam as the Head of State. French negotiating pressures on him and the National Union included both spurious "leaks" of Franco-Viet Minh settlement talks, and further assurances of intentions to grant Vietnamese autonomy. On June 5, 1948, Bao Dai witnessed the signing of another Bay of Ha Long Agreement. Thereby, France publicly and "solemnly" recognized the independence of Vietnam -- but specifically retained control over foreign relations and the Army, and deferred transfer of other governmental functions to future negotiations; no authority was in fact transferred to the Vietnamese. Again Bao Dai retired to Europe, while in Hanoi the French assembled a transparently impotent semblance of native government. A second summer of war passed in 1948 without dispelling the military miasma over Indochina, and without making the "Bao Dai solution" any less repugnant among Vietnamese patriots. Opposition to it began to mount among French Leftists. This disenchantment, combined with a spreading acceptance of the strategic view that the Franco-Viet Minh war was a key anti-Communist struggle, influenced French leaders to liberalize their approach to the "Bao Dai solution."

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c. Elysee Agreement, 1949

On March 8, 1949, after months of negotiations, French President Auriol, in an exchange of letters with Bao Dai, reconfirmed independence for Vietnam as an Associated State of the French Union and detailed procedures for unifying Vietnam and placing it under Vietnamese administration. Nonetheless, in the Elysee Agreement, France yielded control of neither Vietnam's army nor its foreign relations, and again postponed arrangements for virtually all other aspects of autonomy. However, Bao Dai, apparently convinced that France was now sufficiently desperate in Indochina that it would have to honor the Agreements, declared that:

"...An era of reconstruction and renovation will open in Vietnam. The country will be given democratic institutions that will be called on primarily to approve the present agreement....Profound economic and social reforms will be instituted to raise the general standard of living and to promote social justice, which is the condition and guarantee of order.../I look for/ the union of all Vietnamese regardless of their political and religious tendencies, and the generous support of France on which I can count..." 5/

His public stance notwithstanding, Bao Dai delayed his return to Vietnam until a Cochinchinese Assembly had been elected (albeit in a farce of an election), and did not proceed to Saigon until the French Assembly had approved Cochinchina's joining the rest of Vietnam. In late June, 1949, Vietnam was legally united under Bao Dai, but the related alteration of administrative functions was slow, and usually only pro forma; no genuine power or authority was turned over to the Vietnamese. The State of Vietnam became a camouflage for continued French rule in Indochina. As Bao Dai himself characterized the situation in 1950, "What they call a Bao Dai solution turned out to be just a French solution....The situation in Indochina is getting worse every day..." 6/

d. Bao Dai's Governments

The unsavory elements of the coalition supporting Bao Dai dominated his regime. Ngo Dinh Diem and a few other upright nationalists refused high government posts, and withdrew their support from Bao Dai when their expectations of autonomy were disappointed. Diem's public statement criticized the probity of those who did accept office:

"The national aspirations of the Vietnamese people will be satisfied only on the day when our nation obtains the same political regime which India and Pakistan enjoy... I believe it is only just to reserve the best posts in the new Vietnam for those who have deserved best of the country; I speak of those who resist..." 7/

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However, far from looking to the "resistance," Bao Dai chose his leaders from among men with strong identification with France, often men of great and dubious wealth, or with ties with the sub-worlds of French neo-mercantilism and Viet vice. None commanded a popular following. General Georges Revers, Chief of Staff of the French Army, who was sent to Vietnam to appraise the situation in May and June, 1949, wrote that:

"If Ho Chi Minh has been able to hold off French intervention for so long, it is because the Viet Minh leader has surrounded himself with a group of men of incontestable worth... [Bao Dai, by contrast, had] a government composed of twenty representatives of phantom parties, the best organized of which would have difficulty in rallying twenty-five adherents..." 8/

Bao Dai himself did next to nothing to make his government either more representative or more efficient. He divided his time among the pleasures of the resort towns of Dalat, Nha Trang, and Banmethuout, and for all practical purposes, remained outside the process of government.

An American diplomat serving in Vietnam at the time who knew Bao Dai well, characterized him in these terms:

"Bao Dai, above all, was an intelligent man. Intellectually, he could discuss the complex details of the various agreements and of the whole involved relationship with France as well as or better than anyone I knew. But he was a man who was crippled by his French upbringing. His manner was too impassive. He allowed himself to be sold by the French on an erroneous instead of a valid evolutionary concept, and this suited his own temperament. He was too congenial, and he was almost pathologically shy, which was one reason he always liked to wear dark glasses. He would go through depressive cycles, and when he was depressed, he would dress himself in Vietnamese clothes instead of European ones, and would mince no words about the French. His policy, he said to me on one of these dour occasions, was one of 'grignotage,' or 'nibbling,' and he was painfully aware of it. The French, of course, were never happy that we Americans had good relations with Bao Dai, and they told him so. Unfortunately, they also had some blackmail on him, about his relationship with gambling enterprises in Saigon and his love of the fleshpots." 9/

Whatever his virtues, Bao Dai was not a man who could earn the fealty of the Vietnamese peasants. He could not even hold the loyalty of honest nationalists, one of whom, for example, was Dr. Phan Quang Dan -- a prominent and able non-Communist leader and early supporter of the "solution,"

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and a personal friend of Bao Dai -- (Dr. Dan later was the opposition leader of the Diem era). Dr. Dan reported a touching conversation with Bao Dai's mother in which she described her son at a loss to know whom to trust, and heartsick at the atmosphere of hostility which surrounded him. 10/ Yet Dr. Dan resigned as Bao Dai's Minister of Information over the Elysee Agreement, and, though he remained close to the Emperor, would not reassume public office for him. Bao Dai himself furnished an apt description of his political philosophy which may explain why he failed to capture the hearts of either beleaguered farmers or serious political leaders -- neither of whom could stomach "nibbling" when revolution was required. Said Bao Dai:

"To practice politics is like playing a game, and I have always considered life a game." 11/

e. The Pau Negotiations, 1950

Yet Bao Dai did work at pressing the French. French officials in fact complained to an American writer that Bao Dai spent too much of his time on such pursuits:

"He has concentrated too much on getting what he can from us instead of building up his support among the people of the country...History will judge if he did right in putting so much stress on that..." 12/

From late June, 1950, until the end of November, Bao Dai stayed close to the series of conferences in Pau, France, designed to arrange the transfer to the Vietnamese of the services of immigration, communications, foreign trade, customs, and finances. The issue of the finance service was a particularly thorny one, involving as it did lucrative foreign exchange controls. While the French did eventually grant significant concessions to the Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians in each area discussed, they preserved "rights of observation" and "intervention" in matters that "concerned the French Union as a whole." Indeed, the French assured themselves full access to government information, license to participate in all government decisions, and little reduction in economic benefits. 13/

Some French commentators viewed Pau as an unmitigated disaster and the assurance of an early French demise in Indochina. As one writer put it:

"By accepting the eventual restriction of trade within the French Union, by losing all effective authority over the issuance of money, by renouncing control over foreign trade, by permitting a system of controlled prices for exports and imports, we have given the Associated States all the power they need if they wish to assure the ruin of our enterprises and compel their withdrawal without in any way molesting our compatriots." 14/

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But a contemporary Vietnamese critic took a quite different view:

"All these conventions conserve in Indochina a privileged position for French capital, supported by the presence of a powerful fleet and army. Even if no one talks any more of an Indochinese Federation, it is still a federalism both administrative and economic (Monetary Union, Customs Union, Communications Union, etc.) which co-ordinates the various activities of the three Associated States. France always exercises control through the representatives she has in all the organs of planning or of federal surveillance, and through what is in effect the right of veto, because the president or the secretary general of these committees is always elected by joint decision of the four governments and, further, because most of the decisions of the committees are made by unanimous agreement."
(Quoted in same reference above)

Bao Dai's delegates were, however, generally pleased with the outcome of Pau. His Prime Minister, Tran Van Huu declared as he signed the conventions that "our independence is now perfect." But to the ordinary Vietnamese, to honest Frenchmen, and to the Americans, Tran Van Huu was proved dramatically wrong.

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2. U.S. Policy Towards Bao Dai

a. Qualified Approval, 1947-1950

The "Bao Dai solution" depended on American support. During the 1950 negotiations in Pau, France, Bao Dai's Prime Minister Tran Van Huu was called back to Indochina by a series of French military reverses in Tonkin. Tran Van Huu seized the occasion to appeal to the United States "as the leading democratic nation," and hoped that the U.S. would

"... bring pressure to bear on France in order to achieve democratic freedom. We want the right to decide our own affairs for ourselves." 15/

Tran demanded the Elysee Agreement be superseded by genuine autonomy for Vietnam:

"It is not necessary for young men to die so that a French engineer can be director of the port of Saigon. Many people are dying every day because Viet Nam is not given independence. If we had independence the people would have no more reason to fight."

Tran's addressing the U.S. thus was realistic, if not judicious, for the U.S. had already become involved in Indochina as one part of a troubled triangle with France and Bao Dai's regime. Indeed, there had been an American role in the "Bao Dai solution" from its inception. Just before the Ha Long Bay Agreements, the French initiative had received some support from a December, 1947, Life magazine article by William C. Bullitt, former U.S. Ambassador to France. Bullitt argued for a policy aimed at ending "the saddest war" by winning the majority of Vietnamese nationalists away from Ho Chi Minh and from the Communists through a movement built around Bao Dai. 16/ Bullitt's views were widely accepted in France as a statement of U.S. policy, and a direct endorsement, and promise of U.S. aid, for Bao Dai. Bao Dai, whether he accepted the Bullitt canard or not, seemed to sense that the U.S. would inevitably be drawn into Southeast Asia, and apparently expected American involvement to be accompanied by U.S. pressure on France on behalf of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S., though it appreciated France's dilemma, was reluctant initially to endorse the Bao Dai solution until it became a reality. The following State Department messages indicate the U.S. position:

July 10, 1948 (Paris 3621 to State):

"... France is faced with alternatives of unequivocally and promptly approving principle [of] Viet independence within French union and [the] union [of the] three parts of Vietnam or losing Indochina."

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July 14, 1948 (State 2637 to Paris):

"... Once Bay of Ha Long Agreement together with change in status of Cochinchina is approved, Department would be disposed to consider lending its support to extent of publicly approving French Government's action as forward looking step toward settlement of troubled situation in Indochina and toward realization of aspirations Vietnamese people. It appears to Department that above stated U.S. approval would materially assist in strengthening hands of nationalists as opposed to communists in Indochina..."

August 30, 1948 (State 3368 to Paris):

"Department appreciates difficulties facing any French Government taking decisive action vis-a-vis Indochina, but can only see steadily deteriorating situation unless there is more positive approval Bay of Ha Long Agreement, enactment legislation or action permitting change Cochinchina status, and immediate commencement formal negotiations envisaged that Agreement. Department believes that nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group. No such inducement possible unless that group can show concrete evidence that French are prepared to implement promptly creation Vietnamese free state which is associated with the French Union and with all attributes free state..."

January 17, 1949 (State 145 to Paris):

"While Department desirous French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has reasonable chance winning over preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrevably sic commit U.S. to support of native government which by failing develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually puppet government, separated from people, and existing only by presence French military forces..."

The Elysee Agreement took place in March, 1949. At this juncture, the fall of China obtruded, and the U.S. began to view the "Bao Dai solution" with a greater sense of urgency:

May 10, 1949 (State 77 to Saigon):

"Assumption ... Department desires the success Bao Dai experiment entirely correct. Since there appears to be no other alternative to established Commie pattern in Vietnam, Department considers no effort should be spared by France, other Western powers, and non-Commie Asian nations to assure experiment best chance succeeding.

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"At proper time and under proper circumstances Department will be prepared to do its part by extending recognition to the Bao Dai Government and by exploring the possibility of complying with any request by such a Government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. It must be understood, however, that aid program this nature would require Congressional approval. Since U.S. could scarcely afford backing a government which would have color of, and be likely to suffer the fate of, a puppet regime, it must first be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make Bao Dai solution attractive to nationalists.

"This is a step of which French themselves must see urgency and necessity in view possibly short time remaining before Commie successes in China are felt in Indochina. Moreover, Bao Dai Government must through own efforts demonstrate capacity to organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to ensure maximum opportunity of obtaining requisite popular support, inasmuch as any government created in Indochina analogous to the Kuomintang would be foredoomed failure.

"Assuming essential French concessions are forthcoming, best chance of success for Bao Dai would appear to be in persuading Vietnamese nationalists:

- (1) their patriotic aims may be realized promptly through French-Bao Dai agreement
- (2) Bao Dai government will be truly representative even to the extent of including outstanding non-Commie leaders now supporting Ho, and
- (3) Bao Dai solution is the only means of safeguarding Vietnam from aggressive designs of the Commie Chinese."

Through 1949, the southward march of Mao's legions continued, and the Viet Minh were obviously preparing to establish relations with them.

b. Recognition, 1950

The Elysee Agreements were eleven months old before the U.S. considered that France had taken the concrete steps toward Vietnamese autonomy which the U.S. had set as conditions for recognizing Bao Dai. In late January, 1950, events moved swiftly. Ho Chi Minh announced that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnam people" and indicated DRV willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." Mao responded promptly with recognition, followed by Stalin.

In France there was an acrimonious debate in the National Assembly between leftist advocates of immediate truce with the Viet Minh and government supporters of the Elysee Agreement to proceed with the Bao Dai solution. René Plevén, Minister of National Defense, declared that: 17/

"It is necessary that the French people know that at the present time the only true enemy of peace in Viet Nam is the Communist Party. Because members of the Communist Party know that peace in Indochina will be established by the policy of independence that we are following."

("Peace with Viet Nam! Peace with Viet Nam!" shouted the Communists.)

Jean Letourneau arose to assert that:

"It is not at all a question of approving or disapproving a government; we are very far beyond the transitory life of a government in an affair of this gravity. It is necessary that, on the international level, the vote that takes place tonight reveals truly the major importance that this event should have in the eyes of the entire world."

Frédéric Dupont said:

"The Indochina war has always been a test of the French Union before international Communism. But since the arrival of the Chinese Communists on the frontier of Tonkin, Indochina has become the frontier of Western civilization and the war in Indochina is integrated into the cold war."

Premier Georges Bidault was the last speaker:

"The choice is simple. Moreover there is no choice."

The National Assembly vote on January 29, 1950, was 396 to 193. From the extreme left there were cries of "Down with the war!" and Paul Coste-Floret replied: "Long live peace." On February 2, 1950, France's formal ratification of the independence of Vietnam was announced.

The U.S. assessment of the situation, and its action, is indicated in the following:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-15 and A-16).

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington

February 2, 1950

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: U.S. Recognition of Vietnam,
Laos and Cambodia

1. The French Assembly (Lower House) ratified on 29 January by a large majority (396 - 193) the bill which, in effect, established Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as autonomous states within the French Union. The opposition consisted of 181 Communist votes with only 12 joining in from other parties. The Council of the Republic (Senate) is expected to pass the bills by the same approximate majority on or about February 3. President Auriol's signature is expected to follow shortly thereafter.
2. The French legislative and political steps thus taken will transform areas which were formerly governed as Protectorates or Colonies into states within the French Union, with considerably more freedom than they enjoyed under their prior status. The French Government has indicated that it hopes to grant greater degrees of independence to the three states as the security position in Indochina allows, and as the newly formed governments become more able to administer the areas following withdrawal of the French.
3. Within Laos and Cambodia there are no powerful movements directed against the governments which are relatively stable. However, Vietnam has been the battleground since the end of World War II of conflicting political parties and military forces. Ho Chi Minh, who under various aliases, has been a communist agent in various parts of the world since 1925 and was able to take over the anti-French nationalist movement in 1945. After failing to reach agreement with the French regarding the establishment of an autonomous state of Vietnam, he withdrew his forces to the jungle and hill areas of

Vietnam.

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Vietnam and has harassed the French ever since. His followers who are estimated at approximately 75,000 armed men, with probably the same number unarmed. His headquarters are unknown.

The French counter efforts have included, on the military side, the deployment of approximately 130,000 troops, of whom the approximately 50,000 are local natives serving voluntarily, African colonials, and a hard core made up of French troops and Foreign Legion units. Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla tactics have been aimed at denying the French control of Vietnam. On March 8, 1949 the French President signed an agreement with Bao Dai as the Head of State, granting independence within the French Union to the Government of Vietnam. Similar agreements were signed with the King of Laos and the King of Cambodia.

Recent developments have included Chinese Communist victories bringing those troops to the Indochina border; recognition of Ho Chi Minh as the head of the legal Government of Vietnam by Communist China (18 January) and by Soviet Russia (30 January).

4. Recognition by the United States of the three legally constituted governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia appears desirable and in accordance with United States foreign policy for several reasons. Among them are: encouragement to national aspirations under non-Communist leadership for peoples of colonial areas in Southeast Asia; the establishment of stable non-Communist governments in areas adjacent to Communist China; support to a friendly country which is also a signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty; and as a demonstration of displeasure with Communist tactics which are obviously aimed at eventual domination of Asia, working under the guise of indigenous nationalism.

Subject to your approval, the Department of State recommends that the United States of America extend recognition to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, following ratification by the French Government.

(signed) DEAN ACHESON

Approved

9(signed)

Harry S. Truman

February 3, 1950

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c: U.S. Aid to Indochina

On February 16, 1950, France requested U.S. military and economic assistance in prosecuting the Indochina War. 18/ The Secretary of Defense in a Memorandum for the President on March 6 stated that:

"The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." 19/

The same month, the State Department dispatched an aid survey mission under R. Allen Griffin to Indochina (and to Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaya). The Griffin Mission proposed (inter alia) aid for the Bao Dai government, since the State of Vietnam was considered:

"... not secure against internal subversion, political infiltration, or military aggression.

Aid view "The objective of each program is to assist as much as possible in building strength, and in so doing ... to assure the several peoples that support of their governments and resistance to communist subversion will bring them direct and tangible benefits and well-founded hope for an increase in living standards. Accordingly, the programs are of two main types: (1) technical and material aid to essential services and (2) economic rehabilitation and development, focused primarily on the provision of technical assistance and material aid in developing agricultural and industrial output. ... These activities are to be carried on in a way best calculated to demonstrate that the local national governments are able to bring benefits to their own people and thereby build political support, especially among the rural population....

"The aims of economic assistance to Southeast Asia ... are to reinforce the non-Communist national governments in that region by quickly strengthening and expanding the economic life of the area, improve the conditions under which its people live, and demonstrate concretely the genuine interest of the United States in the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia." 20/

In a strategic assessment of Southeast Asia in April, 1950, the JCS recommended military assistance for Indochina, provided:

"... that United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs..." 21/

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved \$10 million for urgently needed military assistance items for Indochina. 22/ The President's

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decision was taken in the context of the successful amphibious invasion of Nationalist-defended Hainan by a Communist Chinese army under General Lin Piao -- with obvious implications for Indochina, and for Taiwan. One week later, on May 8, the Secretary of State announced U.S. aid for "the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." 23/ Sixteen days later, Bao Dai's government and France were notified on May 24 of the U.S. intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States. As the North Korean Army moved southward on June 27, 1950, President Truman announced that he had directed "acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina..." 24/

The crucial issue presented by the American decision to provide aid to Indochina was who should be the recipient -- Bao Dai or France -- and, hence, whose policies would U.S. aid support?

d. French Intransigence

While the U.S. was deliberating over whether to provide economic and military assistance to Indochina in early 1950, negotiations opened at Pau, France, among France and the Associated States to set the timing and extent of granting autonomy. Had these talks led to genuine independence for Bao Dai's regime, the subsequent U.S.-French relationship would probably have been much less complex and significantly less acerbic. As it was, however, the Pau accords led to little more independence than had the Ha Long Bay or Elysee Agreements. Moreover, France's reluctance to yield political or economic authority to Bao Dai was reinforced by its proclivity to field strong-willed commanders, suspicious of the U.S., determined on a military victory, and scornful of the Bao Dai solution. General Marcel Carpentier, Commander in Chief when the French applied for aid, was quoted in the New York Times on March 9, 1950, as follows:

"I will never agree to equipment being given directly to the Vietnamese. If this should be done I would resign within twenty-four hours. The Vietnamese have no generals, no colonels, no military organization that could effectively utilize the equipment. It would be wasted, and in China the United States has had enough of that." 25/

(1) 1950-1951: De Lattre and "Dynamisme"

Carpentier's successor, High Commissioner-Commander in Chief General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, arrived in December, 1950, following the severe setback of the autumn. De Lattre electrified the discouraged French forces like General Ridgway later enheartened U.S. forces in Korea. De Lattre saw himself as leading an anti-communist crusade. He calculated that he could win a decisive victory within fifteen months in Vietnam, and "save it from Peking and Moscow." He deprecated the idea that the French were still motivated by colonialism, and even told one U.S. newsman that France fought for the West alone:

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"We have no more interest here... We have abandoned all our colonial positions completely. There is little rubber or coal or rice we can any longer obtain. And what does it amount to compared to the blood of our sons we are losing and the three hundred and fifty million francs we spend a day in Indochina? The work we are doing is for the salvation of the Vietnamese people. And the propaganda you Americans make that we are still colonialists is doing us tremendous harm, all of us -- the Vietnamese, yourselves, and us." 26/

Moreover, De Lattre was convinced that the Vietnamese had to be brought into the fight. In a speech -- "A Call to Vietnamese Youth" -- he declared:

"This war, whether you like it or not, is the war of Vietnam for Vietnam. And France will carry it on for you only if you carry it on with her.... Certain people pretend that Vietnam cannot be independent because it is part of the French Union. Not true! In our universe, and especially in our world of today, there can be no nations absolutely independent. There are only fruitful interdependencies and harmful dependencies.... Young men of Vietnam, to whom I feel as close as I do to the youth of my native land, the moment has come for you to defend your country." 27/

Yet, General De Lattre regarded U.S. policy vis-a-vis Bao Dai with grave misgivings. Americans, he held, afflicted with "missionary zeal," were "fanning the fires of extreme nationalism... French traditionalism is vital here. You cannot, you must not destroy it. No one can simply make a new nation overnight by giving out economic aid and arms alone." 28/ As adamantly as Carpentier, De Lattre opposed direct U.S. aid for Vietnamese forces, and allowed the Vietnamese military little real independence.

Edmund A. Gullion, U.S. Minister Counselor in Saigon from 1950 on, faulted De Lattre on his inability to stimulate in the Vietnamese National Army either the elan vital or dynamisme he communicated to the rest of the French Expeditionary Corps:

"... It remained difficult to inculcate nationalist ardor in a native army whose officers and non-coms were primarily white Frenchmen... The Vietnamese units that went into action were rarely unsupported by the French. American contact with them was mainly through the French, who retained exclusive responsibility for their training. We felt we needed much more documentation than we had to assess the army's true potential. We needed battalion-by-battalion reports on the performance of the Vietnamese in training as well as in battle and a close contact with intelligence and command echelons, and we never got this. Perhaps the most significant and saddest manifestation of the French failure to create a really independent Vietnamese Army

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that would fight in the way de Lattre meant was the absence, at Dienbienphu, of any Vietnamese fighting elements. It was a French show." 29/

Gullion is not altogether correct with respect to Dien Bien Phu; nonetheless, statistics on the ethnic composition of the defending garrison do reveal the nature of the problem. The 5th Vietnamese Parachute Battalion was dropped to reinforce the garrison so that as of May 6, 1954, the troops at Dien Bien Phu included: 30/

Garrison of Dien Bien Phu

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>NCO's</u>	<u>EM's</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Vietnamese	<u>11</u>	<u>270</u>	<u>5,119</u>	<u>5,480</u>
Total	393	1,666	13,026	15,105
Viet % of Total	2.8	16.2	39.2	36.2

Thus, the Vietnamese comprised more than a third of the fighting forces (and nearly 40% of the enlisted troops); but among the leaders, they provided one-sixth of the non-commissioned officers and less than 3% of the officers.

The paucity of Viet officers at Dien Bien Phu reflected the general condition of the National Army: as of 1953, there were 2,600 native officers, of whom only a handful held rank above major, compared to 7,000 French officers in a force of 150,000 Vietnamese troops. 31/

(2) 1951-1953: Letourneau and "Dictatorship"

De Lattre's successor as High Commissioner, Jean Letourneau, was also the French Cabinet Minister for the Associated States. Letourneau was sent to Indochina to assume the same power and privilege in the "independent" State of Vietnam that any of France's Governor Generals had ever exercised from Saigon's Norodom Palace. In May, 1953, a French Parliamentary Mission of Inquiry accused the Minister-High Commissioner of "veritable dictatorship, without limitation or control":

"The artificial life of Saigon, the temptations of power without control, the security of a judgment which disdains realities, have isolated the Minister and his entourage and have made them insensible to the daily tragedy of the war ...

"It is no longer up to us to govern, but to advise. The big thing was not to draw up plans irresponsibly, but to carry on daily a subtle diplomacy. In Saigon our representatives have allowed themselves to be inveigled into the tempting game of power and intrigue.

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"Instead of seeing the most important things and acting on them, instead of making on the spot investigations, of looking for inspiration in the village and in the ricefield, instead of informing themselves and winning the confidence of the most humble people, in order to deprive the rebels of their best weapon, the Norodom Palace clique has allowed itself the luxury of administering à la française and of reigning over a country where revolution is smouldering ...

"The press has not the right of criticism. To tell the truth, it has become official, and the principal newspaper in Saigon is at the disposition of the High Commissariat. Letters are censored. Propaganda seems to be issued just to defend the High Commissariat. Such a regime cannot last, unless we are to appear as people who are determined not to keep their promises." 32/

The Parliamentary Mission described Saigon: "where gambling, depravity, love of money and of power finish by corrupting the morale and destroying will-power ..."; and the Vietnamese government: "The Ministers [of the Bao Dai regime] appear in the eyes of their compatriots to be French officials ..." The report did not hesitate to blame the French for Vietnamese corruption:

"It is grave that after eight years of laissez-aller and of anarchy, the presence in Indochina of a resident Minister has not been able to put an end to these daily scandals in the life in regard to the granting of licenses, the transfer of piastres, war damages, or commercial transactions. Even if our administration is not entirely responsible for these abuses, it is deplorable that one can affirm that it either ignores them or tolerates them." 33/

Commenting on this report, an influential French editor blamed the "natural tendency of the military proconsulate to perpetuate itself" and "certain French political groups who have found in the war a principal source of their revenues ... through exchange operations, supplies to the expeditionary corps and war damages ..." 34/ He concluded that:

"The generally accepted theory is that the prolongation of the war in Indochina is a fatality imposed by events, one of those dramas in history which has no solution. The theory of the skeptics is that the impotence or the errors of the men responsible for our policy in Indochina have prevented us from finding a way out of this catastrophic enterprise. The truth is that the facts now known seem to add up to a lucid plan worked out step by step to eliminate any possibility of negotiation in Indochina in order to assure the prolongation without limit of the hostilities and of the military occupation." 35/

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e. Bao Dai, Attentiste

Despite U.S. recognition of the grave imperfections of the French administration in Vietnam, the U.S. was constrained to deal with the Indochina situation through France both by the overriding importance of its European policy and by the impotence and ineptitude of the Bao Dai regime. The U.S. attempted to persuade Bao Dai to exercise more vigorous leadership, but the Emperor chose differently. For example, immediately after the Pau negotiations, the Department of State sent these instructions to Edmund Gullion:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-23 thru A-25)

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OUTGOING TELEGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SECRET

OCT 18 1950
2 P.M.

PRIORITY

AMLEGATION

SAIGON

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DEPT wishes to have FOL MSG delivered to Bao Dai personally by MIN IMMED after Chief of State's arrival in Saigon. It SHLD be delivered informally without submission written text with sufficient emphasis to leave no doubt in Emperor's mind that it represents DEPTS studied opinion in matter now receiving ATTN highest auths US GOVT. Begin MSG:

Bao Dai will arrive in Saigon at moment when Vietnam is facing grave crisis outcome of which may decide whether country will be permitted develop independence status or pass in near future to one of Sino-Soviet dominated satellite, a new form of colony immeasurably worse than the old from which Vietnam has so recently separated herself.

The US GOVT is at present moment taking steps to increase the AMT of aid to FR Union and ASSOC States in their effort to defend the territorial integrity of IC and prevent the incorporation of the ASSOC States within the COMMIE-dominated bloc of slave states but even the resources of US are strained by our present UN commitments in Korea, the need for aid in the defense of Western Europe and our own rearmament program. We sometimes find it impossible to furnish aid as we WLD wish in a given AMT at a given time and in a given place.

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Leadership of Vietnam GOVT during this crucial period is a factor of preponderant importance in deciding ultimate outcome. GOVT must display unusually aggressive leadership and courage before a discouraged people, distraught and floundering in the wake of years of civil war. Lesser considerations concerning the modalities of relations between the States of the FR Union and the REP of FR must, for instance, be at least temporarily laid aside in face of serious threat to very existence of Vietnam as autonomous state, within FR Union or otherwise.

We are aware (as is Bao Dai) that present Vietnamese GOVT is so linked with person of Chief of State that leadership and example provided by latter takes on extraordinary importance in determining degree of efficiency in functioning of GOVT. Through circumstances of absence in FR of Bao Dai and other Vietnamese leaders for prolonged period, opportunity for progress in assumption of responsibilities from FR and extension authority and influence of GOVT with people was neglected. Many people, including great number AMERS, have been unable understand reasons for Emperor's GTE prolonged holiday UNQTE on Riviera and have misinterpreted it as an indication of lack of patriotic attachment to his role of Chief of State. DEPT is at least of opinion that his absence did not enhance the authority and prestige of his GOVT at home.

Therefore, DEPT considers it imperative Bao Dai give Vietnamese people evidence his determination personally take up reins of state and lead his country into IMMEDIATE and energetic opposition COMMUNIST menace. Specifically he SHOULD embark upon IMMEDIATE program of visits to all parts Vietnam making numerous speeches and public appearances in the process. Chief of State SHOULD declare his determination plunge into job of rallying people to support of GOVT and opposition to VM IMMEDIATE upon arrival Saigon. He SHOULD announce US, FR support for formation NATAL armies and his own intention assume role Commander in Chief. He SHOULD take full advantage of FR official declaration of intention to form NATAL armies (confirmed yesterday by MIN ASSC States Letourneau) and set up precise plan for such formation IMMEDIATE.

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Finally, it SHLD be tactfully suggested that any further display procrastination in facing realities in the form prolonged periods of seclusion at Dalat or otherwise WLD confirm impressions of those not as convinced of Emperor's seriousness of purpose as DEPT and LEG are and raise questions of the wisdom of continuing to support a Vietnamese GOVT which proves itself incapable of exercising the autonomy acquired by it at such a high price. End of MSG.

Endeavor obtain private interview soonest possible after arrival for DEPT regards timing as of prime importance. Simultaneously or IMMEDIATELY inform Letourneau and Pignon of action. Saigon advise Paris in advance to synchronize informing FOMOFF

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Whatever Bao Dai's response -- probably polite and obscure -- he did not act on the U.S. advice. He subsequently told Dr. Phan Quang Dan, aboard his imperial yacht, that his successive governments had been of little use, and added that it would be dangerous to expand the Vietnamese Army because it might defect en masse and go to the Viet Minh.

"I could not inspire the troops with the necessary enthusiasm and fighting spirit, nor could Prime Minister Huu... Even if we had an able man, the present political conditions would make it impossible for him to convince the people and the troops that they have something worth while to fight for..." 36/

Dr. Dan agreed that the effectiveness of the National Army was a central issue; he pointed out that there were but three Viet generals, none of whom had ever held operational command, and neither they nor the 20 colonels or lieutenant colonels could exercise initiative of any sort. Dr. Dan held that: "The Vietnamese Army is without responsible Vietnamese leaders, without ideology, without objective, without enthusiasm, without fighting spirit, and without popular backing." 37/ But it was very clear that Bao Dai did not propose to alter the conditions of his army except by the long, slow process of "nibbling" at French military prerogative. On other vital issues Bao Dai was no more aggressive. For all practical purposes, the Emperor, in his own fashion, like Dr. Dan and Ngo Dinh Diem, assumed the posture of the attentiste -- a spectator as the French and Americans tested their strength against each other, and against the Viet Minh.

f. The American Predicament

Among the American leaders who understood the vacuity of the Bao Dai solution, and recognized the pitfalls in French intransigence on genuine independence was the then Senator John F. Kennedy. Kennedy visited Vietnam in 1951 and evidently weighed Gullion's views heavily. In November, 1951, Kennedy declared that:

"In Indochina we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of the French regime to hang on to the remnants of an empire. There is no broad general support of the native Vietnam Government among the people of that area." 38/

In a speech to the U.S. Senate in June, 1953, he pointed out that:

"Genuine independence as we understand it is lacking in Indochina ... local government is circumscribed in its functions ... the government of Vietnam, the state which is of the greatest importance in this area, lacks popular support, that the degree of military, civil, political, and economic control maintained by the French goes well beyond what is necessary to fight a war... It is because we want the war to be brought to a successful conclusion that we should insist

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on genuine independence... Regardless of our united effort, it is a truism that the war can never be successful unless large numbers of the people of Vietnam are won over from their sullen neutrality and open hostility to it and fully support its successful conclusion... I strongly believe that the French cannot succeed in Indochina without giving concessions necessary to make the native army a reliable and crusading force." 39/

Later, Kennedy criticized the French:

"Every year we are given three sets of assurances: first, that the independence of the Associated States is now complete; second, that the independence of the Associated States will soon be completed under steps 'now' being taken; and third, that military victory for the French Union forces is assured, or is just around the corner." 40/

Another American knowledgeable concerning the U.S.-French difficulties and with the Bao Dai solution was Robert Blum, who headed the economic aid program extended to the Bao Dai regime in 1950. General De Lattre viewed U.S. economic aid as especially pernicious, and told Blum that: "Mr. Blum, you are the most dangerous man in Indochina." 41/ De Lattre resented the American intrusion. "As a student of history, I can understand it, but as a Frenchman I don't like it." In 1952, Blum analyzed the Bao Dai-French-American triangle as follows:

"The attitude of the French is difficult to define. On the one hand are the repeated official affirmations that France has no selfish interests in Indochina and desires only to promote the independence of the Associated States and be relieved of the terrible drain of France's resources. On the other hand are the numerous examples of the deliberate continuation of French controls, the interference in major policy matters, the profiteering and the constant bickering and ill-feeling over the transfer of powers and the issues of independence... There is unquestionably a contradiction in French actions between the natural desire to be rid of this unpopular, costly and apparently fruitless war and the determination to see it through with honor while satisfying French pride and defending interests in the process. This distinction is typified by the sharp difference between the attitude toward General de Lattre in Indochina, where he is heralded as the political genius and military savior ... and in France, where he is suspected as a person who for personal glory is drawing off France's resources on a perilous adventure...

"It is difficult to measure what have been the results of almost two years of active American participation in the affairs of Indochina. Although we embarked upon a course of uneasy association with the 'colonialist'-tainted but

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indispensable French, on the one hand, and the indigenous, weak and divided Vietnamese, on the other hand, we have not been able fully to reconcile these two allies in the interest of a single-minded fight against Communism. Of the purposes which we hoped to serve by our actions in Indochina, the one that has been most successful has been the strengthening of the French military position. On the other hand, the Vietnamese, many of whom thought that magical solutions to their advantage would result from our appearance on the scene, are chastened but disappointed at the evidence that America is not omnipotent and not prepared to make an undiluted effort to support their point of view... Our direct influence on political and economic matters has not been great. We have been reluctant to become directly embroiled and, though the degree of our contribution has been steadily increasing, we have been content, if not eager, to have the French continue to have primary responsibility, and to give little, if any, advice." 42/

Blum concluded that:

"The situation in Indochina is not satisfactory and shows no substantial prospect of improving, that no decisive military victory can be achieved, that the Bao Dai government gives little promise of developing competence and winning the loyalty of the population ... and that the attainment of American objectives is remote." 43/

Shortly before his death in 1965, Blum held that a clash of French and U.S. interests was inevitable:

"We wanted to strengthen the ability of the French to protect the area against Communist infiltration and invasion, and we wanted to capture the nationalist movement from the Communists by encouraging the national aspirations of the local populations and increasing popular support of their governments. We knew that the French were unpopular, that the war that had been going on since 1946 was not only a nationalist revolt against them but was an example of the awakening self-consciousness of the peoples of Asia who were trying to break loose from domination by the Western world. We recognized right away that two-pronged policy was beset with great difficulties. Because of the prevailing anti-French feeling, we knew that any bolstering by us of the French position would be resented by the local people. And because of the traditional French position, and French sensitivity at seeing any increase of American influence, we knew they would look with suspicion upon the development of direct American relations with local administrations and peoples. Nevertheless, we were determined that our aid program would not be used as a means of forcing

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co-ordination upon unwilling governments, and we were equally determined that our emphasis would be on types of aid that would appeal to the masses of the population and not on aid that, while economically more sophisticated, would be less readily understood. Ours was a political program that worked ? with the people and it would obviously have lost most of its effectiveness if it had been reduced to a role of French-protected anonymity ... [The program was] greatly handicapped and its beneficial psychological results were largely negated because the United States at the same time was pursuing a program of [military] support to the French ... on balance, we came to be looked upon more as a supporter of colonialism than as a friend of the new nation." 44/

In 1965, Edmund Gullion, who was also very close to the Bao Dai problem, took this retrospect:

"We really should have pushed the French right after the Elysee agreements of March, 1949. We did not consider the exchange of letters carefully enough at the time. It was understandable. We obviously felt it was going to be a continuing process, and we hoped to be able to have some influence over it. But then we got involved in Korea, and since the French were in trouble in Indochina, we pulled our punches... The French could have said unequivocally, as we did with regard to the Philippines, that in such-and-such a number of years Vietnam would be totally free, and that it could thereupon join the French Union or stay out, as it desired... An evolutionary solution was the obvious one, and it should have been confronted openly and honestly without all the impossible, protracted preliminary negotiations involving efforts to bring the three Associated States together, to get them to agree among each other, and with France, separately and collectively. The French, in arguing against any kind of bilateral agreements, claimed that their attempt at federation in Indochina was like our effort to build some sort of federated system in Europe. But their involvement and interest in Indochina was obviously different, and they used the formula they devised to avoid any real agreement on Vietnam. The problem grew more complex as the military and political aspects of the situation became unavoidably tied together, and the Korean War, of course, complicated it further. From the outset, the French sought to regard the war in Korea and the war in Indochina as related parts of one big fight against Communism, but it wasn't that simple. Actually, what the Korean War did do was make it more difficult for us to urge an evolutionary settlement in Vietnam. By 1951, it may have been too late for us to do anything about this, but we could still have tried much harder than we did. The trouble was the world by then had begun to close in on us. The E.D.C. formula in Europe was being rejected by the French, just as in 1965 they were rejecting the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization concept. Our degree of leverage was being drastically reduced." 45/

Had Bao Dai been willing or capable of more effective leadership, the U.S. role in the war might not have fallen into what Edmund Gullion called the "pattern of prediction and disappointment":

"It can be timed almost to the month to coincide with the rainy season and the campaign season. Thus, in May or June, we usually get French estimates of success in the coming campaign season, based partly on an assessment of losses the Vietminh are supposed to have suffered in the preceding fall, which are typically claimed as the bright spot in an otherwise gloomy fighting season. The new set of estimates soon proves equally disappointing; by October, French Union troops are found bottled up in mountain defiles far from their bases... There are rumblings about late or lacking American aid and lack of American understanding. Some time around the first of the new year, special high-level United States-French conferences are called. We ask some questions about the military situation but only a few about the political situation. There is widespread speculation that the French may pull out of Indochina if we press them for explanations of their political and economic program. We promise the French more aid. The French make a stand: they claim great casualties inflicted on the enemy. They give us new estimates for the following campaign season -- and the round begins once more." 46/

In that bleak pattern, Bao Dai played only a passive role; the "Bao Dai solution" ultimately solved nothing. The outcome rested rather on France's military struggle with the Viet Minh, and its contest of leverage with the United States.

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II. A. 2.

LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

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II. A. 2. LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

It is sometimes asserted that France could not have continued the war in Indochina without American aid, but that the United States failed to use its considerable leverage on the French to force them to take more positive steps towards granting complete independence to the Associated States. An examination of Franco-American relations between 1950-1954 suggests, however, that American leverage was severely limited and that, given the primacy accorded in U.S. policy to the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, French leverage on the United States was the stronger of the two.

1. American Leverage on France

a. NATO and Marshall Plan

In the first postwar decade, France was relatively weak and depended upon the United States through NATO and the Marshall Plan for its military security and economic revival. But neither NATO nor the Marshall Plan offered usable fulcrums for influencing French policy on Indochina. Both were judged by the U.S. Government and public to be strongly in the American national interest at a time when the Soviet threat to Western Europe, either through overt aggression or internal subversion, was clearly recognizable. A communist take-over in France was a real possibility. (The French Communist Party was the largest political party in the nation, and, at the time, quite militant in character.) Thus, an American threat to withdraw military and economic support to metropolitan France if it did not alter its policies in Indochina was not plausible. To threaten France with sanctions in NATO or through the Marshall Plan would have jeopardized a U.S. interest in Europe more important than any in Indochina.

b. Military Assistance Program

The chief remaining source of influence was the military assistance program to the French in Indochina. Announced by President Truman on May 8, 1950, in response to an urgent French request of February 16, 1950, for military and economic assistance, the purpose of the aid was to help the French in the prosecution of the war against the Viet Minh. The American Ambassador in Paris was called to the Quay d'Orsay, following a determination by the French Government that "it should set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina from French point of view as a result of recent developments and the expectation that at least increased military aid will be furnished to Ho Chi Minh from Communist China." He was told:

"...that the effort in Indochina was such a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise...it was very likely that France might be forced

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to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina...looking into the future it was obvious...that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about...." 1/

Although the decision to extend aid to the French military effort in Indochina was taken before the outbreak of the Korean War, it clearly was heavily influenced by the fall of Nationalist China, and the arrival of Communist Chinese troops on the Indochina border in December, 1949. The Ho Chi Minh regime was recognized as the legal government of Vietnam by the Chinese Communists on January 18, 1950, and twelve days later the Soviet Government similarly announced its recognition. The NSC was thereupon asked "to undertake a determination of all practicable United States measures to protect its security in Indochina and to prevent the expansion of communist aggression in that area." In NSC 64 (February 27, 1950) it concluded that:

"It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard." 2/

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring on April 5, 1950, to intelligence estimates indicating that the situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated, noted that "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." 3/ Therefore, the rationale for the decision to aid the French was to avert Indochina's sliding into the communist camp, rather than aid for France as a colonial power or a fellow NATO ally.

U.S. assistance, which began modestly with \$10 million in 1950, reached \$1,063 million in fiscal year 1954, at which time it accounted for 78% of the cost of the French war burden. The major portion of the increase came in the last year of the war, following the presentation in 1953 of the Navarre Plan, which called for the enlargement of Franco-Vietnamese forces and a dynamic strategy to recapture the initiative and pave the way for victory by 1955. The optimistic endorsement of the Navarre Plan by Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, head of the MAAG in Indochina, as being capable of turning the tide and leading to a decisive victory over the Viet Minh contributed to Washington's agreement to substantially raise the level of assistance. But equally important, the Navarre Plan, by being a concrete proposal which

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held out the promise of ending the long war, put France in a position to pressure the United States for more funds to underwrite the training and equipping of nine additional French battalions and a number of new Vietnamese units.

c. U.S. Supports Independence for Associated States

Throughout the period of assistance to the French military effort, American policy makers kept in mind the necessity of encouraging the French to grant the Associated States full independence and to take practical measures in this direction, such as the training of Vietnamese officers and civil servants. Such active persuasion was delicate and difficult because of the high sensitivity of the French to any "interference" in their "internal" affairs.

A reading of the NSC memorandum and the France-American diplomatic dialogue of the time indicates that Washington kept its eyes on the ultimate goal of the de-colonialization of Indochina. Indeed, it was uncomfortable in finding itself -- forced by the greater necessity of resisting Viet Minh communism -- in the same bed as the French. American pressure may well have helped account for the public declaration of Premier Joseph Laniel of July 3, 1953, that the independence and sovereignty of the Associated States would be "perfected" by transferring to them various functions which had remained under French control, even though no final date was set for complete independence. 4/ At an NSC meeting on August 6, 1953 President Eisenhower stated that assistance to the French would be determined by three conditions:

- (1) A public French commitment to "a program which will insure the support and cooperation of the native Indochina";
- (2) A French invitation for "close [U.S.] military advice";
- (3) Renewed assurances on the passage of the EDC. 5/

Consistent with these, Washington's decision of September 9, 1953, to grant \$385 million towards implementation of the Navarre Plan was made dependent upon a number of conditions. The American Ambassador was instructed to inform Prime Minister Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault that the United States Government would expect France to:

"....continue pursue policy of perfecting independence of Associated States in conformity with July 3 declaration;

"facilitate exchange information with American military authorities and take into account their views in developing and carrying out French military plans Indochina;

"assure that no basic or permanent alteration of plans and programs for NATO forces will be made as result of additional effort Indochina;...." 6/

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d. Limitation on American Leverage

The United States attempted to use its military assistance program to gain leverage over French policies, but was severely constrained in what it could do. The U.S. military mission (MAAG) in Saigon was small and limited by the French in its functions to a supply-support group. Allocation of all U.S. aid to the Associated States had to be made, by agreement, solely through the French. Thus, MAAG was not allowed to control the dispensing of supplies once they arrived in Vietnam. MAAG officers were not given the necessary freedom to develop intelligence information on the course of the war; information supplied by the French was limited, and often unreliable or deliberately misleading. The French resisted repeated U.S. admonitions that the native armies of the Associated States be built up and consequently they did not create a true national Vietnamese army. With some minor exceptions, the French excluded American advisors from participating in the training for the use of the materials being furnished by the U.S.

General Navarre viewed any function of MAAG in Saigon beyond bookkeeping to be an intrusion upon internal French affairs. Even though it would have been difficult beyond 1952 to continue the war without American aid, the French never permitted participation by U.S. officials in strategic planning or policy making. 7/ Moreover, the French suspected the economic aid mission of being over-sympathetic to Vietnamese nationalism. The director of the economic aid program, Robert Blum, and the DCM of the American Embassy, Edmund Guillion, were subjected to French criticisms of their pro-Vietnamese views, although the American Ambassador, Donald Heath, remained staunchly pro-French. Thus, French officials insisted that American assistance be furnished with "no strings attached" and with virtually no control over its use. Underlying this attitude was a deep-seated suspicion that the United States desired to totally supplant the French, economically as well as politically, in Indochina. 8/

2. French Leverage on the United States

French leverage over the United States was made possible by the conviction, apparently firmly held in Washington, that the maintenance of a non-Communist Indochina was vital to Western -- and specifically American -- interests.

a. Primarily it was France's War

The most fundamental fact was that the French were carrying on a war which the United States considered, rightly or wrongly, to be essential. Thus, the French were always able to threaten simply to end the war by pulling out of Indochina. By the early 1950's, with the French nation tired of the "la sale guerre," this would not have been an unpopular decision within France. Paris was thereby able to hint --

which it did -- that if U.S. assistance was not forthcoming, it would simply withdraw from Indochina, leaving to the United States alone the task of the containment of communism in Southeast Asia. When the Laniel Government requested in the fall of 1953 a massive increase in American assistance, the State Department representative at an NSC meeting asserted that "if this French Government, which proposes reinforcing Indochina with our aid, is not supported by us at this time, it may be the last such government prepared to make a real effort to win in Indochina." 9/ In effect, then, because of the overriding importance given by Washington to holding the communist line in Indochina, the French in being able to threaten to withdraw possessed an important instrument of blackmail.

The upshot of this was that U.S. leverage was quite minimal. Since the French were, in a way, fighting a U.S. battle as well as their own to prevent communist control of Indochina, any ham-fisted U.S. pressure was bound to weaken the French resolve and capability. Consequently, the leverage which the U.S. attained through its aid could be used for little more than to urge greater efficiency and determination on France. In other words, Washington could move Paris to formulate a Navarre type plan, but could not influence the way France conducted the war, nor could it move France on political issues in dispute.

b. Expectation of French Success

The temptation to "go along" with the French until the Viet Minh was defeated was all the more attractive because of the expectation of victory which pervaded official Washington. Before Dien Bien Phu, General O'Daniel consistently reported that victory was within reach if the United States continued its support. In November, 1953, General O'Daniel submitted a progress report on the Navarre Plan which summarized what the French had been doing and what remained to be accomplished. The report said that French Union forces held the initiative and would begin offensives in mid-January, 1954 in the Mekong Delta and in the region between Cape Varella and Da Nang. Meanwhile, a relatively small force would attempt to keep the Viet Minh off balance in the Tonkin Delta until October, 1954, when the French would begin a major offensive North of the 19th parallel. The report concluded by assessing that the Navarre Plan was basically sound and should be supported since it would bring a decisive victory. 10/

O'Daniel's optimism was not duplicated by other observers. CINCPAC, for one, considered the report over-optimistic, stating that political and psychological factors were of such crucial importance that no victory would be possible until the Vietnamese were able to capture villages and until psychological warfare operations could be undertaken to win over the people. 11/ The Army attaché in Saigon was even less sanguine. He flatly stated that the French, after six months of the Navarre Plan, were still on the defensive and showed no sign of being able to win the war in the future. The attaché's views were, moreover,

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concurred in by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, who observed that other high U.S. military officers in Indochina agreed with the attaché and found O'Daniel's report unwarrantedly optimistic. 12/

c. American Policy in Europe: The EDC

An important source of French leverage was to be found outside of Far Eastern affairs. A primary objective of American foreign policy in 1953-1954 was the creation of a European Defense Community (E.D.C.). The purpose of the EDC was to "envelopé" a new West German Army into an integrated six nation army which would go a long way towards providing for the defense of Western Europe. Washington officials expected that the EDC would permit a reduction (but not complete elimination) of American ground forces in Europe. The membership of France in the EDC -- as a counter-weight to the proposed re-arming of Germany -- was essential to its adoption by the five other European nations. Because of the high priority given to EDC in American planning, there was a strong reluctance to antagonize the French in Indochina. This was reinforced by knowledge that the French placed a far lower priority on EDC, in part because of the traditional French fear of an armed Germany, in part because the French estimate of Soviet intentions in Western Europe differed from that of the United States in that it placed a low probability on a direct Soviet intervention. 13/

Apparently unnoticed at the time was an implicit contradiction in the American policy of pushing the French simultaneously on both adopting the EDC and on making a greater effort in Indochina. The latter required increased French forces in the Far East. But the French National Assembly would not adopt the EDC unless, at a minimum, it was assured that French forces in Europe would be on parity with those of Germany. Thus, the French argued that the possible coming into effect of the EDC prevented them from putting larger forces into Indochina. After the loss of North Vietnam and the French rejection of EDC, the Chairman of an Interdepartmental Working Group set up to formulate a new American policy on Indochina for the post-Geneva period observed that "our policies thus far have failed because we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both." 14/

d. French Desire for Negotiations

French leverage was also demonstrated by their ability to have the Indochina problem placed on the agenda for the Geneva Conference at the time of the Quadripartite Foreign Minister's meeting in February 1954 in Berlin. The Geneva Conference had been called to work out a political settlement for the Korean War. Dulles did not wish to negotiate on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation of the French and they could negotiate from a position of far greater strength. But the Laniel Government was under mounting pressure from French public opinion to end the Indochinese war. At Berlin the French delegation insisted, despite American objections, that Indochina be

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inscribed on the Geneva agenda. Foreign Minister Bidault reportedly warned that if the United States did not acquiesce on this point, EDC would doubtlessly be scuttled.

Dulles did succeed in opposing Soviet efforts to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power at Geneva and forced the acceptance in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition would be implied in the Chinese invitation to the conference. In return for this concession, however, the French were able to give highly visible evidence of their interest in ending the war soon through negotiations. Ironically, this had a double-edged effect: in Paris the "peace faction" was mollified; but in Hanoi plans were made to step up the intensity of the war so as to make a show of strength prior to the beginning of the Geneva Conference. Thus, the coming battle of Dien Bien Phu came to have a crucial significance in large measure because of the very inclusion of the Indochina item for the Geneva Conference. As Ellen Hammer has written:

"This was the last opportunity before the Geneva Conference for the Viet Minh to show its military strength, its determination to fight until victory. And there were those who thought that General Giap was resolved on victory, no matter the cost, not only to impress the enemy but also to convince his Communist allies that the Viet Minh by its own efforts had earned a seat at the conference table and the right to a voice in its own future. For the French....upon the outcome of the battle depended much of the spirit in which they would send their representatives to Geneva." 15/

e. Conclusion: Incompatibility of American and French Objectives

In summary, one must take notice of the paradox of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the French with respect to Indochina, 1950-1954. American interests and objectives were basically different from those of the French. The United States was concerned with the containment of communism and restricting the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. The immediate U.S. objective was supporting a domino. France, on the other hand, was fighting primarily a colonial war designed to maintain the French presence in Southeast Asia and avoid the crumbling of the French Union. Despite occasional pledges to the "perfectionment" of independence for the Associated States -- pledges which were usually given under circumstances which were forcing France to "justify" the war, in part to receive further American assistance -- France was not fighting a long and costly war in order to thereafter completely pull out.

The fact that the American and French means -- pushing for military victory -- converged in 1950-1954 obscured the fact that the ends of the two nations were inherently incompatible. This further led

to a basic incompatibility in the two strands of American policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the war and win, preferably with American guidance and advice; and (2) having achieved success at great cost in what the French viewed at least initially as more a "colonial" than "anti-communist" war, Washington expected the French to withdraw magnanimously. (A Frenchman might have asked how France, even if it wished to, could have left Indochina without creating similar pressures for withdrawal from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, where over one million Frenchmen lived.) In this inherent inconsistency can be found much of the explanation for the lack of American leverage over France during the pre-Geneva years..

II. A. 3.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO
SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

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II. A. 3. PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

Three major perceptions dominated U.S. thinking and policy-making on Indochina during the years 1950-1954. The first was the growing importance of Asia in world politics. The process of devolution from colonial empires to independent states, it was thought, would create power vacuums and conditions of instability which would make Asia susceptible to becoming a battleground in the growing East-West cold war conflict. Second, there was an undeniable tendency to view the worldwide "communist threat" in monolithic terms. This was perhaps understandable given the relatively extensive influence then exerted by the Soviet Union over other communist nations, and the communist parties in non-communist states. Moreover, the West, and especially the U.S., was challenged by the expansionist policies openly proclaimed by leaders of virtually all the communist movements. Third, the attempt of the patently Communist Ho Chi Minh regime to evict the French from Indochina was seen as part of the Southeast Asian manifestation of the communist world-wide aggressive intent. The resistance of France to Ho, therefore, was seen as a crucial stand on the line along which the West would contain communism.

1. "Domino Principle" Before Korea

These three perceptions help explain the widely held assumption in official Washington that if Indochina was "lost" to communism, the remaining nations of Southeast Asia would inexorably succumb to communist infiltration and be taken over in a chain reaction. This strategic conception of the communist threat to Southeast Asia pre-dated the outbreak in June 1950 of the Korean War. It probably had its period of gestation at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China. NSC 48/1 was the key document in framing this conception. Drawn up in June 1949, after Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had expressed concern at the course of events in Asia and had suggested a widening of the previous country-by-country memorandum approach to a regional plan, NSC 48/1 included the statements that "the extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us...If Southeast Asia is also swept by communism, we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia." 1/

It was Russia rather than China that was seen in 1949 as being the principal source of the communist threat in Asia. Although it was conceded that in the course of time China (or Japan or India) may attempt to dominate Asia, --

"now and for the foreseeable future it is the USSR which threatens to dominate Asia through the complementary instruments of communist conspiracy and diplomatic pressure

supported by military strength. For the foreseeable future, therefore, our immediate objective must be to contain and where feasible to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations."

NSC 48/1 also recognized that "the colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist movements, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target for a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin."

At this time, the NSC believed that the United States, as a Western power in any area where the bulk of the population had long been suspicious of Western influence, should insofar as possible refrain from taking any lead in Southeast Asia. The United States should instead "encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area," recognizing "that the non-communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against communist expansion in Asia." NSC 48/2 pointed out that particular attention should be given to the problem of Indochina where "action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese."

2. Importance of Indochina

Indochina was of special importance because it was the only area adjacent to China which contained a large European army which was in armed conflict with "communist" forces. The Chinese Communists were believed to be furnishing the Viet Minh with substantial material assistance. Official French sources reported that there were some Chinese troops in Tonkin, as well as large numbers ready for action against the French on the Chinese side of the border. The first NSC memorandum dealing solely with Indochina (NSC 64) was adopted as policy on March 27, 1950. This paper took note of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh and estimated that it was doubtful that the French Expeditionary forces, combined with Indochinese troops, could successfully contain Ho Chi Minh's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese troops crossing the border, or by communist-supplied arms and material in quantity.

NSC 64 -- written, it should be noted, by the Truman Administration and before the outbreak of the Korean War -- observed that "the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia." It concluded with a statement of what came to be known as the "domino principle":

World's attention is being drawn to the fact that the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia.

"It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard." 2/ *i.e. no matter how installed*

3. Impact of Start of Korean War

The outbreak of the Korean War, and the American decision to resist North Korean aggression, sharpened overnight our thoughts and actions with respect to Southeast Asia. The American military response symbolized in the most concrete manner possible the basic belief that holding the line in Southeast Asia was essential to American security interests. The French struggle in Indochina came far more than before to be seen as an integral part of the containment of communism in that region of the world. Accordingly, the United States intensified and enlarged its programs of aid in Indochina. Military aid shipments to Indochina acquired in 1951 the second highest priority, just behind the Korea war program. 3/

A consequence of the Korean War, and particularly the Chinese intervention, was that China replaced the Soviet Union as the principal source of the perceived communist threat in Southeast Asia. This was made explicit in NSC 124/2 (June 1952) which stated that "the danger of an overt military attack against Southeast Asia is inherent in the existence of a hostile and aggressive Communist China."

The "domino principle" in its purest form was written into the "General Considerations" section of NSC 124/2. It linked the loss of any single state of Southeast Asia to the stability of Europe and the security of the United States:

"2. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.

"a. The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with communism of

the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow. Such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.

WOW!

"b. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the U.S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U.S. security interests in the Far East.

"c. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and India, all important areas of free Asia.

"d. The loss of Southeast Asia, especially of Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to communism." 4/

The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to the Chinese intervention in Korea, came to dominate the thinking of American policy-makers after the start of the Korean War. Such an intervention would not have been surprising given the larger numbers of Chinese troops massed along the Tonkin border and the materiel assistance being given to the Viet Minh. The NIE of December 1950 considered direct Chinese intervention to be "impending." 5/ The following year it was estimated that after an armistice in Korea the Chinese would be capable of intervention in considerable strength, but would be inhibited from acting overtly by a number of factors, including the risk of American retaliation and the disadvantages attendant upon involvement in another protracted campaign. 6/ By early 1952, as the French position showed signs of deterioration, intelligence authorities believed that the Chinese would be content to continue aiding the Viet Minh without undertaking direct involvement (except for material aid) unless provoked into it. 7/ Thus, the intelligence community, after estimating a high risk of Chinese intervention at the start of the Korean War, gradually reduced its estimate of Indochina being broadened into a wider war as the Viet Minh showed signs of doing well enough on their own.

Nevertheless, the NSC undertook in 1952 to list a course of action for the "resolute defense" of Indochina in case of a large-scale Chinese intervention. It included the provision of air and naval forces; the interdiction of Chinese communication lines, including those in China proper; and a naval blockade of the China coast. If these "minimum courses of action" did not prove to be sufficient, the U.S. should take air and

naval action "against all suitable military targets in China," when possible in conjunction with British and French forces. 8/

In prescribing these recommended actions, the NSC focused on the less likely contingency of a Chinese intervention rather than the more likely contingency of the continued deterioration of the French position in Indochina itself. It did so despite the fact that NSC 124/2 conceded that the "primary threat" was the situation in Indochina itself (increasing subversive efforts by indigenous communist forces, increased guerrilla activity, and increased Viet Minh civil control over population and territory). Apparently, the NSC wanted to make clear that direct U.S. involvement in Indochina was to be limited to dealing with direct Chinese involvement. In the absence of this contingency, however, and to meet the existing situation in Indochina, the NSC recommended that the United States increase its level of aid to French Union forces but "without relieving the French authorities of their basic military responsibility for the defense of the Associated States." 9/

4. Republican Administration and Far East

Two events in 1953 served to deepen the American commitment in Indochina. The first was the arrival of a Republican Administration following a long period in which the G.O.P. had persistently accused the Truman Administration of being responsible for the "loss" of China to communism. The writings and speeches of John Foster Dulles before the election left no doubt that he regarded Southeast Asia as a key region in the conflict with communist "imperialism", and that it was important to draw the line of containment north of the Rice Bowl of Asia -- the Indochina peninsula. 10/ In his first State of the Union Message on February 3, 1953, President Eisenhower promised a "new, positive foreign policy." He went on to link the communist aggression in Korea and Malaya with Indochina. Dulles subsequently spoke of Korea and Indochina as two flanks, with the principal enemy -- Red China -- in the center. A special study mission headed by Representative Walter Judd, a recognized Republican spokesman on Asia, surveyed the Far East and reported on its view of the high stakes involved:

"The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, Malaya, Singapore and even Indonesia would become more vulnerable to the Communist power drive....Communism would then be in an exceptional position to complete its perversion of the political and social revolution that is spreading through Asia....The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina." 11/

The Republican Administration clearly intended to prevent the loss of Indochina by taking a more forthright, anti-communist stand.

5. Impact of Korean Armistice

Second, the armistice in Korea created apprehension that the Chinese Communists would now turn their attention to Indochina. President Eisenhower warned in a speech on April 16, 1953, that any armistice in Korea that merely released armed forces to pursue an attack elsewhere would be a fraud. Secretary Dulles continued this theme after the Korean armistice in a speech on September 2, 1953, on the war in Indochina. After noting that "a single Communist aggressive front extends from Korea on the north to Indochina in the south" he said:

"Communist China has been and now is training, equipping and supplying the Communist forces in Indochina. There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own Army into Indochina. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina. I say this soberly...in the hope of preventing another aggressor miscalculation." 12/

Underlying these warnings to China was the belief that the difference between success or failure in avoiding a takeover of all Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh probably depended upon the extent of Chinese assistance or direct participation. Signaling a warning to China was probably designed to deter further Chinese involvement. Implicit in the signals was the threat that if China came into the war, the United States would be forced to follow suit, preferably with allies but, if necessary, alone. Furthermore, the Eisenhower Administration implied that in keeping with its policy of massive retaliation the United States would administer a punishing nuclear blow to China without necessarily involving its land forces in an Asian war.

6. Deepening of U.S. Commitment to Containment

In addition to the new mood in Washington created by the strategic perceptions of a new Administration and the Korean armistice, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and the deepening war weariness in France served to strengthen those who favored a more assertive policy in Indochina. The United States rushed supplies to Laos and Thailand in May 1953 and provided six C-119's with civilian crews for the airlift into Laos. 13/ It increased substantially the volume and tempo of American military assistance to French Union forces. For fiscal year 1954, \$460 million in military assistance was planned. Congress only appropriated \$400 million, but following the presentation by the French of the Navarre Plan an additional \$385 million was decided upon by the NSC. 14/ No objection was raised when France asked our views in August, 1953, on the transfer of its battalion in Korea to Indochina and subsequently took this action. 15/ The Navarre Plan, by offering a format for victory which promised success without the direct involvement of American military forces, tended, because of its very attractiveness, to have the effect of enlarging our commitment to assist the French towards achieving a military solution.

In the last NSC paper approved before the Indochina situation was totally transformed by the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, the "successful defense of Tonkin" was said to be the "keystone of the defense of mainland Southeast Asia except possibly Malaya." 16/ NSC 5405 took some, but probably not sufficient, account of the deterioration in the French position which had occurred since NSC 124/2 was approved eighteen months earlier. It, nevertheless, repeated the domino principle in detail, including the admonition that "such is the interrelation of the countries of the area that effective counteraction would be immediately necessary to prevent the loss of any single country from leading to submission to, or an alignment with, communism by the remaining countries of Southeast Asia and Indonesia." The document also noted that:

"In the conflict in Indochina, the Communists and non-Communists worlds clearly confront one another in the field of battle: The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia and South Asia, would therefore have the most serious repercussions on U.S. and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere."

The subject of possible negotiations was broached in NSC 5405, following the observation that political pressures in France may impel the French Government to seek a negotiated rather than a military settlement. It was noted (before Dien Bien Phu) that if the Navarre Plan failed or appeared doomed to failure, the French might seek to negotiate simply for the best possible terms, irrespective of whether these offered any assurance of preserving a non-communist Indochina.

In this regard the NSC decided the U.S. should employ every feasible means to influence the French Government against concluding the struggle on terms "inconsistent" with the basic U.S. objectives. The French should be told that: (1) in the absence of a marked improvement in the military situation, there was no basis for negotiation on acceptable terms; (2) the U.S. would "flatly oppose any idea" of a cease-fire as a preliminary to negotiations, because such a cease-fire would result in an irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position in Indochina; (3) a nominally non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh with no opportunity for the replacement of the French by the United States or the United Kingdom. /Emphasis Added/

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, two comments can be made:

a. With the growing perception of a Chinese threat to Indochina, and, therefore, to all of Southeast Asia, the U.S. Government tended to concentrate on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. In consequence, American attention focused on (1) deterring external intervention from China, and (2) assisting the French

in successfully prosecuting the war through the implementation of the Navarre Plan. The result of this was that the encouragement and support of the non-communist nationalist governments in the Associated States was almost inadvertently given lower priority. The United States was reluctant to press the French too strongly on taking measures to foster Vietnam nationalism because of its overriding interest in halting the potential sweep of communism through Southeast Asia. Moreover, it was easier to develop a policy for dealing with the external threat of intervention than to meet the internal threat of subversion, or the even more difficult process of finding and sustaining a genuine nationalist alternative to the Viet Minh.

b. The "domino theory" and the assumptions behind it were never questioned. The homogeneity of the nations of Southeast Asia was taken as a given, as was the linkage in their ability to remain democratic, or at an acceptable minimum, non-communist, nations. Undoubtedly, in the first decade of the cold war there existed an unfortunate stereotype of a monolithic communist expansionary bloc. It was reinforced by a somewhat emotional approach on the part of many Americans to communism in China and Asia. This "syndrome" was, in part, the result of the "fall" of China, which some felt could have been averted, and a few hoped would still be reversed.

Accordingly, not sufficient cognizance was taken of the individuality of the states of Southeast Asia and the separateness of their societies. Probably there was some lack of knowledge in depth on the part of Washington policy-makers about the area. No one before World War II had expected that the United States would be called upon to take a position of leadership in these remote colonial territories of our European allies. In hindsight, these shortcomings may have led to the fallacious belief that a neutralist or communist Indochina would inevitably draw the other states of Asia into the communist bloc or into neutralism. But the "fallacy" was neither evident then, nor is it demonstrable now in retrospect.

B1

B2

SUMMARY

B2

Among the more frequently cited misapprehensions concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam is the view that the Eisenhower Administration flatly rejected intervention in the First Indochina War. The record shows plainly that the U.S. did seriously consider intervention, and advocated it to the U.K. and other allies. With the intensification of the French-Viet Minh war and the deterioration of the French military position, the United States was forced to take a position on: first, a possible U.S. military intervention in order to avert a Viet Minh victory; second, the increasingly likely contingency of negotiations between Paris and Ho Chi Minh to end the war through a political settlement. In order to avoid a French sell-out, and as an alternative to unilateral U.S. intervention, the U.S. proposed in 1954 to broaden the war by involving a number of allies in a collective defense effort through "united action."

The U.S. Government internal debate on the question of intervention centered essentially on the desirability and feasibility of U.S. military action. Indochina's importance to U.S. security interests in the Far East was taken for granted. The Eisenhower Administration followed in general terms the rationale for American interest in Indochina that was expressed by the Truman Administration. With respect to intervention, the Truman Administration's NSC 124 of February 1952 recognized that the U.S. might be forced to take some military action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In late 1953 - early 1954, as the fall of Indochina seemed imminent, the question of intervention came to the fore. The Defense Department pressed for a determination by highest authority of the size and nature of the forces the U.S. was willing to commit in Indochina. Some in DOD questioned the then operating assumption that U.S. air and naval forces would suffice as aid for the French. The Army was particularly concerned about contingency planning that assumed that U.S. air and naval action alone could bring military victory, and argued for realistic estimates of requisite land forces, including the degree of mobilization that would be necessary. The State Department thought that Indochina was so critical from a foreign policy viewpoint that intervention might be necessary. But DOD and the JCS, estimating that air-naval action alone could not stem the surging Viet Minh, recommended that rather than intervening directly, the U.S. should concentrate on urging Paris to train an expanded indigenous army, and should exert all possible pressures -- in Europe as well as in Asia -- to motivate the French to fight hard for a military victory. Many in the U.S. Government (the Ridgway Report stands out in this group) were wary that U.S. intervention might provoke Chinese Communist intervention. In the latter case, even a considerable U.S. deployment of ground forces would not be able to stem the tide in Indochina. A number of special high-level studies were unable to bridge the evident disparity between those who

held that vital U.S. interests were at stake in Indochina, and those who were unwilling to make a firm decision to intervene with U.S. ground forces to assure those interests. Consequently, when the French began pressing for U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu, the Eisenhower Administration took the position that the U.S. would not intervene unilaterally, but only in concert with a number of European and Far Eastern allies as part of a combined force. (Tab 1)

This "united action" proposal, announced publicly by Secretary Dulles on March 29, 1954, was also designed to offer the French an alternative to surrender at the negotiating table. Negotiations for a political settlement of the Franco-Viet Minh war, however, were assured when the Big Four Foreign Ministers meeting in February at Berlin placed Indochina on the agenda of the impending Geneva Conference. Foreign Minister Bidault insisted upon this, over U.S. objections, because of the mounting pressure in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The "peace faction" in Paris became stronger in proportion to the "peace feelers" let out by Ho Chi Minh, and the lack of French success on the battlefield. U.S. policy was to steer the French away from negotiations because of the fear that Indochina would thereby be handed over to the communist "empire."

Secretary Dulles envisaged a ten-nation collective defense force to take "united action" to prevent a French defeat -- if necessary before the Geneva Conference. Dulles and Admiral Radford were, at first, inclined towards an early unilateral intervention at Dien Bien Phu, as requested by the French (the so-called "Operation Vulture"). But Congressional leaders indicated they would not support U.S. military action without active allied participation, and President Eisenhower decided that he would not intervene without Congressional approval. In addition to allied participation, Congressional approval was deemed dependent upon a public declaration by France that it was speeding up the timetable for independence for the Associated States.

The U.S. was unable to gather much support for "united action" except in Thailand and the Philippines. The British response was one of hesitation in general, and flat opposition to undertaking military action before the Geneva Conference. Eden feared that it would lead to an expansion of the war with a high risk of Chinese intervention. Moreover, the British questioned both the U.S. domino principle, and the belief that Indochina would be totally lost at Dien Bien Phu and through negotiations at Geneva. As for the French, they were less interested in "united action" than in immediate U.S. military assistance at Dien Bien Phu. Paris feared that united action would lead to the internationalization of the war, and take control out of its hands. In addition, it would impede or delay the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. But repeated French requests for direct U.S. intervention during the final agony of Dien Bien Phu failed to alter President Eisenhower's conviction that it would be an error for the U.S. to act alone.

Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu during the Geneva Conference, the "domino theory" underwent a reappraisal. On a May 11 press conference, Secretary Dulles observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without, perhaps, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." In a further remark that was deleted from the official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager populations. (Tab 2)

DISCUSSION

- II. B. Tab 1 - The Interagency Debate over U.S. Intervention in Indochina
 Tab 2 - The Attempt to Organize "United Action"

II. B. 1.

THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE
OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

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II. B. 1. THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

1. The General Policy Context

The debate over the wisdom and manner of American intervention in Indochina was based primarily on the desirability of military involvement, not on questions concerning Indochina's value to United States security interests in the Far East. The Eisenhower Administration was in general agreement with the rationale for American interest in Indochina expressed by the Truman Administration. The United States Government first came to full grips with the question of intervention in late 1953 -- early 1954 as the fall of Indochina seemed to become imminent.

a. The Final Truman Program (NSC 124)

NSC 124 (February, 1952) considered imperative the prevention of a Communist take-over in Indochina. It recognized that even in the absence of "identifiable aggression" by Communist China, the U.S. might be forced to take some action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In case of overt Chinese intervention, NSC 124 recommended: (1) naval, air and logistical support of French Union forces; (2) naval blockade of Communist China; (3) attacks by land and carrier-based aircraft on military targets in Mainland China. It stopped short of recommending the commitment of U.S. ground forces in Indochina. 1/

b. Eisenhower Administration's "Basic National Security Policy"

NSC 162/2, adopted in October, 1953, ten months after the Republican Administration took office, was the basic document of the "New Look." After commenting on U.S. and Soviet defense capabilities, the prospect of nuclear parity and the need to balance domestic economic policy with military expenditures, it urged a military posture based on the ability "to inflict massive retaliatory damage" on the enemy. Indochina was listed as an area of "strategic importance" to the U.S. An attack on such important areas "probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressor." The use of tactical nuclear weapons in conventional war situations was recommended, but they were not specifically suggested for use in Indochina. 2/

2. The Question of Intervention with Ground Forces

a. The Problem is Presented

In late 1953, the Army questioned prevalent assumptions that ground forces would not be required in Indochina if the area was as important to U.S. security interests as the NSC papers stated. The Army urged that the issue be faced squarely in order to provide the best possible preparation for whatever courses of action might be undertaken. The Plans Division of the Army General Staff pointed out that under current

programs the Army did not have the capability of providing divisional forces for operations in Indochina while maintaining its existing commitments in Europe and the Far East. Army also suggested a "reevaluation of the importance of Indochina and Southeast Asia in relation to the possible cost of saving it." 3/

With the deterioration of the French military situation in Indochina, the first serious attention came to be given to the manner and size of a U.S. intervention. The question to be faced was: how far was the U.S. prepared to go in terms of force commitments to ensure that Indochina stayed out of Communist hands? The Defense Department, though not of a single mind on this question, pressed for an early determination of the forces the U.S. would be willing to dispatch in an emergency situation. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert Anderson, proposed to Secretary of Defense Wilson on January 6, 1954, that the U.S. decide immediately to employ combat forces in Indochina on the "reasonable assurance of strong indigenous support of our forces," whether or not the French Government approved. 4/ But Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in OSD, wrote:

"... Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement -- such as 'Naval and Air units only.' One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly."

Admiral Davis then went on:

"Comment: If it is determined desirable to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed." 5/

b. NSC: State and Defense Views

The evident disparity between, on the one hand, our high strategic valuation of Indochina, and on the other, our unwillingness to reach a firm decision on the forces required to defend the area became the subject of the NSC's 179th meeting on January 8, 1954. At this meeting the Council discussed NSC 177 on Southeast Asia, 6/ but it decided not to take up the Special Annex to NSC 177 which laid out a series of choices which might face the United States if the French military position in Indochina continued to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the NSC at that time did make some headway on the problem it had posed for itself.

According to summary notes taken of the meeting, 7/ State and Defense were at considerable variance on what should be done in either of two contingencies: first, French abandonment of the struggle; second, a French demand for substantial U.S. forces (ground, sea, and air). The State view considered the French position so critical already as (in the rapporteur's words) to "force the U.S. to decide now to utilize U.S. forces in the fighting in Southeast Asia." The Defense representative refused to underwrite U.S. involvement. He reportedly stated that the French could win by the spring of 1955 given U.S. aid and given "improved French political relations with the Vietnamese... The commitment of U.S. forces in a 'civil war' in Indochina will be an admission of the bankruptcy of our political policies re Southeast Asia and France and should be resorted to only in extremity." He urged that every step be taken to avoid a direct American commitment.

The Council meeting reached two important conclusions, both fully in keeping with the Defense position. First, it decided that a discussion of contingencies for U.S. involvement missed the essential point that the French were capable of winning provided they gained native political and military cooperation. Second, NSC 177 was, as Defense suggested, inadequate in that the study failed to come to grips with the fact that eventual success in Indochina depended upon French ability to solve the problem of how to obtain Vietnamese support for the war effort.

c. The JCS View

The NSC meeting of January 8 still left open the question of U.S. action in the event troops were indisputably necessary to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept their options open. The Chiefs thought that the Navarre Plan was fundamentally sound, but was being steadily undercut by the gulf separating the French from the Vietnamese, by General Navarre's failure to implement U.S. recommendations, and by hesitancy in Paris over the necessary political concessions to the Bao Dai government. Yet JCS refused either to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces or to back unequivocally their employment. 8/

d. Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina

Dissatisfaction with NSC 177 and the NSC's subsequent failure in NSC 5405 9/ to resolve the ground force commitment issue led to the formation of a working group to evaluate the French military effort, to make recommendations concerning future U.S. contributions to it, and to devote attention to the various contingencies under which the U.S. might be called upon to intervene directly in the war. The working group, under the chairmanship of General G. B. Erskine (USMC, Ret.), was composed of representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and CIA. The group was responsible to NSC through General W. Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, who had been appointed by the Council to head the Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina.

e. The Erskine Report, Part I: Motivate the French

The first section of Erskine's two-part report, dated February 6, 1954, was based on the assumption that U.S. policy toward Indochina would not require resort to overt combat operations by U.S. forces. Within that framework, the report adhered closely to the Defense Department position that the French, if properly motivated, could win in Indochina, but that their failure to carry through on needed reforms would require U.S. consideration of active involvement. The report noted that:

"There is in Indo-China, or programmed for Indo-China..., a sufficient amount of equipment and supplies and a potential manpower pool sufficient eventually to defeat the Communists decisively if properly utilized and maintained and if the situation continues to permit this manpower to be converted into military effectiveness. Success will ultimately be dependent upon the inspiration of the local population to fight for their own freedom from Communist domination and the willingness of the French both to take the measures to stimulate that inspiration and to more fully utilize the native potential."

The Erskine Report (Part I) recommended: (1) augmentation of the French air force, but not using American personnel; (2) additional U.S. military assistance support of \$124 million (supplementing FY 1954 commitments of \$1.115 billion); (3) elevation of MAAG's status to that of Military Mission, with expanded personnel and advisory authority over training and planning; (4) assignment of additional U.S. personnel with the mission of acting as instructors and performing other key duties within the French forces; (5) Presidential letters to the Heads of State of the Associated States reaffirming our support of their independence and explaining our motivations in assisting them through the French; (6) an effort be undertaken to persuade Bao Dai to take a more active part in the anti-Viet Minh struggle. The report concluded that the program of recommended changes could bring about victory over the Viet Minh if it received full French approval and barring Chinese intervention.

f. The Erskine Report, Part II: Intervention Only After Geneva?

The second part of the Erskine Report did not appear until March 17, 1954, and unlike the first, was the responsibility only of the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs, with the State Department position "reserved." The report confirmed previous determinations that the loss of Indochina would be a major military and political setback for the United States. It recommended that prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, the U.S. should inform Britain and France that it was interested only in military victory in Indochina and would not associate ourselves with any settlement which falls short of that objective. It further recommended that in the event of an unsatisfactory outcome at Geneva, the U.S. should

pursue ways of continuing the struggle in concert with the Associated States, the United Kingdom, and other allies. The National Security Council was therefore requested to determine the extent of American willingness to commit combat forces to the region with or without French cooperation. But with the Dien Bien Phu siege just beginning, and the Geneva Conference six weeks away, the Erskine Report suggested that the United States influence and observe developments at the Geneva Conference before deciding on active involvement.

g. NSC 177 Annex Raises Intervention Question Anew

Following the second part of the Erskine Report, the President evidently decided that the Special Annex to NSC 177, which had been withdrawn in January 1954, should be redistributed for consideration by the Council's Planning Board. 10/ The Annex to NSC 177 posed the fundamental choice between (a) acceptance of the loss of Indochina, which would be followed by U.S. efforts to prevent further deterioration of our security position in Southeast Asia, or (b) direct military action to save Indochina before the French and Vietnamese became committed to an unacceptable political settlement at Geneva.

Among the alternative courses of action outlined in the Annex, two in particular -- both geared to direct U.S. action prior to a Geneva settlement -- were discussed. Under the first, based on French consent to continue fighting, the U.S. was urged to (1) seek a Franco-Vietnamese settlement of the independence issue, (2) insist upon a build-up of indigenous forces with U.S. advisory and material support, (3) demand the maintenance of French forces in the field at their then present level, and (4) prepare to provide sufficient U.S. forces to make possible the success of a joint effort. Full internationalization of the war would be discussed with the French later, thereby discounting immediate action in concert with the British or Asian nations.

The second alternative assumed a French pull-out. In such a case the United States could either accept the loss of Indochina, or adopt an active policy while France gradually withdrew its troops. Should we accept the latter course, our "most positive" step offering "the greatest assurance of success" would be, NSC estimated, to join with indigenous forces in combatting the Viet Minh until they were reduced to the status of scattered guerrilla bands. U.S. land, sea, and air forces would be involved.

The Annex was based upon assumptions that U.S. involvement against the Viet Minh would not provoke massive Chinese intervention, would not lead to direct Soviet involvement, and that there would be no resumption of hostilities in Korea. It acknowledged that any change in these assumptions would seriously jeopardize the success of the alternatives proposed. In particular, it noted that U.S. participation heightened the risk of Chinese intervention, and Chinese entry would alter radically both the immediate military situation and U.S. force requirements.

h. Army Questions Feasibility of Air-Naval Intervention and
Outlines Ground Forces Requirements

The principal result of the discussions on the NSC 177 Special Annex was to bring into the open the issue of the costs in manpower and materiel of a U.S. involvement. The Army was critical of contingency planning that was based on the assumption that U.S. air and naval forces could be used in Indochina without the commitment of ground combat forces. General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, later wrote in his Memoirs that he was quite disturbed at talk in high government circles about employing air-naval power alone in Indochina. An Army position paper submitted to the NSC in the first week of April, 1954, argued as follows:

"1. U.S. intervention with combat forces in Indochina is not militarily desirable...

"2. A victory in Indochina cannot be assured by U.S. intervention with air and naval forces alone.

"3. The use of atomic weapons in Indochina would not reduce the number of ground forces required to achieve a victory in Indochina.

"4. Seven U.S. divisions or their equivalent, with appropriate naval and air support, would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists do not intervene. However, U.S. intervention plans cannot be based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists will not intervene.

"5. The equivalent of 12 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina, if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists intervene.

"6. The equivalent of 7 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French remain and the Chinese Communists intervene.

"7. Requirements for air and naval support for ground force operations are:

a. Five hundred fighter-bomber sorties per day exclusive of interdiction and counter-air operations.

b. An airlift capability of a one division drop.

c. A division amphibious lift.

"8. Two U.S. divisions can be placed in Indochina in 30 days, and an additional 5 divisions in the following 120 days. This could be accomplished without reducing U.S. ground strength in the Far East to an unacceptable degree, but the U.S. ability to meet its NATO commitment would be seriously affected for a considerable period. The amount of time required to place 12 divisions in Indochina would depend upon the industrial and personnel mobilization measures taken by the government..." 11/

i. Defense-JCS "Solution": Rectify French Deficiencies

Faced with estimates that U.S. air-naval action could not turn the tide, and that U.S. ground forces of appropriate size would impinge upon other commitments, DoD and the JCS took the position that an alternative military solution existed within the reach of the French which required no U.S. intervention. DoD argued that the three reasons for France's deteriorating position were (1) lack of the will to win; (2) reluctance to meet Indochinese demands for true independence; (3) refusal to train indigenous personnel for military leadership. Defense believed that premature U.S. involvement would therefore beg the basic question of whether the U.S. was prepared to apply the strongest pressure on France, primarily in the European context, to attempt to force the French in Paris and in Indochina to take appropriate measures to rectify these deficiencies. Only if these measures were forthcoming, DoD held, should the U.S. seriously consider committing ground forces in defense of the interests of France and the Associated States. The net effect of the Defense-JCS position was to challenge the notion that a quick U.S. military action in Indochina would be either feasible or necessary.

3. The New Approach: "United Action"

At this juncture the Eisenhower Administration began giving serious consideration to broadening any American military intervention in Indochina by making it part of a collective venture along with its European and Asian allies. Secretary of State Dulles in a speech on March 29 warned the public of the alarming situation in Indochina and called for "united action" -- without defining it further -- in these words:

"Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today." 12/

Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, to which the Erskine working group had reported, issued a study on April 2. This report went beyond the question of holding Indochina and agreed that whatever that area's fate, the U.S. should begin developing a system of mutual defense for Southeast Asia. For the short term, the Smith Committee favored American sponsorship of a mutual defense treaty directed against Communist aggression in Indochina and Thailand. In the long run, it recommended promotion of a "regional and Asian mutual defense arrangement subscribed and underwritten by the major European powers with interests in the Pacific." 13/

The State Department's thinking in early April 1954 was not greatly at variance from that of Defense and the Smith Committee. Perhaps more so than Defense, State was concerned about the Chinese reaction to a U.S. military intervention. It urged caution and suggested that in any type of "united action" the U.S. make clear to both the Chinese and the allies that the intervention would not be aimed at the overthrow or destruction of the Peking regime. State recommended: (1) no U.S. military intervention for the moment, nor should it be promised to the French; (2) planning for military intervention continue; (3) discussions with potential allies on possibility of forming a regional grouping in the event of an unacceptable settlement at Geneva. 14/

a. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"

Meanwhile, the President decided, following a meeting of Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with Congressional leaders on April 3, that the U.S. would not undertake a unilateral intervention. Any U.S. military involvement in Indochina would be contingent upon (1) formation of a coalition force with U.S. allies to pursue "united action"; (2) declaration of French intent to accelerate independence of Associated States; (3) Congressional approval of U.S. involvement (which was thought to be dependent upon (1) and (2)).

These policy guidelines undoubtedly influenced the NSC which, at a meeting on April 6, developed the somewhat incompatible objectives that the U.S. (a) "intervene if necessary to avoid the loss of Indochina, but advocate that no steps be left untaken to get the French to achieve a successful conclusion of the war on their own" and (b) support as the best alternative to U.S. intervention a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation. 15/

The President accepted the NSC recommendations but decided that henceforth the Administration's primary efforts would be devoted toward: (1) organizing regional collective defense against Communist expansion; (2) gaining British support for U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia; (3) pressing France to accelerate its timetable for Indochinese independence. The President would seek Congressional approval for U.S. participation in a regional arrangement, if it could be put together, and meanwhile contingency planning for mobilization would commence. 16/

b. Rejection of Unilateral Intervention

Thus, as the curtain began to fall on the French effort at Dien Bien Phu, and the question of what the U.S. would do became critical, the U.S. Government backed away from unilateral intervention. The Defense Department was reluctant to intervene following the Army's presentation of the view that air-naval action alone would not do the job and ground forces would be needed. The very recent experience of the Korean War mitigated strongly against another American involvement in an Asian land war. Furthermore, the President was not willing to enter into such a venture unless it was cloaked with Congressional approval. Such approval, in turn, depended upon the participation of the allies. Hence, Secretary Dulles undertook the task of persuading Britain, France and the Asian allies to participate in a coalition for "united action" in Indochina.

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II. B. 2. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

1. The Berlin Conference of 1954

Negotiations for a political settlement of the French-Viet Minh war were practically assured when it was decided at the Big Four meeting in Berlin in February 1954 that the Indochina question would be added to the agenda of an upcoming international conference at Geneva which was to discuss primarily a settlement of the Korean War. The period between the Berlin and Geneva conferences (i.e., between February and May 1954) unexpectedly witnessed a denouement of the Indochina drama with the siege and fall of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. decision not to intervene, and the unsuccessful U.S. attempt to rally its allies together in order to form a collective force in pursuance of "united action."

a. Viet Minh Strategy and French Attitudes

The half-year before the Berlin Foreign Ministers conference of February 1954 saw both a marked step up of Viet Minh military activity and the presentation of a peace feeler from Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnam Peoples Army (VPA) began to change its strategy against the French from guerrilla activities to conventional battle deployments. This was accompanied by an increase in the amount of Chinese military assistance, no doubt facilitated by the end of armed conflict in Korea. Thus, the Viet Minh appeared to be showing a newly found strength and confidence, although at the time the French refused to recognize this either publicly or to themselves.

Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh put out a peace feeler in late November 1953 in reply to a questionnaire submitted by a correspondent for the Swedish newspaper Expressen. The one pre-condition set by Ho for negotiations was French recognition of Vietnamese independence. In subsequent weeks, the peace feeler was repeated on several occasions, but each time it failed to indicate the place at which talks might be held, nor did it propose a scope for the talks. 1/

Nothing resulted directly from these peace feelers, but indirectly they added to the mounting public and political sentiment in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The armistice agreement negotiated at Panmunjom in July 1953 served as an example which many Frenchmen hoped could be followed in the negotiation of a cease-fire with the DRV. A widespread disenchantment with the Indochina war pervaded France. This was reflected in public statements by Prime Minister Laniel that Paris would be satisfied with an "honorable solution" to the war.

The French then adopted a policy toward the war of "keep fighting -- seek talking." There was an increase in French military activity and confidence stimulated by the Navarre Plan, but this was offset by a growth in the size and influence of the peace faction in

France, as indicated by the "dovish" votes of the National Assembly favoring an early settlement of the protracted war. Premier Laniel and French officials told the U.S. Embassy that they considered the Ho Chi Minh offer pure propaganda, but said also that Ho's move had produced the intended impact on public and military circles in France and Indochina. Laniel mentioned that President Vincent Auriol had become so excited by Ho's proposal that he told Laniel "to consult representatives of three Associated States immediately with view to seeking earliest possible opening of negotiations with representatives of Ho Chi Minh. Laniel had flatly refused..." But American officials were skeptical. The U.S. Embassy reported that a Laniel speech of November 24, 1953, "left considerable latitude for negotiations," and that Ho's offers had increased the pressure for a settlement. 2/

b. Early U.S. Opposition to Negotiations

The consistent U.S. policy was to attempt to steer the French clear of the negotiating table pending substantial military gains on the battlefield. In bilateral U.S.-French talks in July, 1953, while the Korean armistice was being discussed at Panmunjom, Foreign Minister Bidault told Secretary Dulles that parallel talks should be pursued on Indochina. Bidault explained that the French public would never understand why negotiations were fit and honorable for Korea but were not for Indochina. A cease-fire in Korea, with nothing similar in prospect for Indochina, would make his government's position "absolutely impossible."

Secretary Dulles in reply stressed that "negotiations with no other alternative usually end in capitulation." In the Korean case, Dulles said, the alternative was the U.S. threat of "other and unpleasant measures" which the Communists realized we possessed. He urged the French to adopt the Navarre Plan, not only for military reasons, but because it would improve the French negotiating position. Dulles made it clear that the U.S. felt it was inadvisable to have the Indochina war inscribed on the agenda of a post-armistice political conference on Korea. 3/ The U.S. position at this time foreclosed negotiating on Indochina until after a Chinese decision to eliminate or cut down aid to the Viet Minh. 4/ In general, the U.S. sought to convince the French that military victory was the only guarantee of diplomatic success.

Dulles wished the French to continue the war because of his deep conviction that Indochina was a principal link in the line of the containment of Communism. In addition, Washington was undoubtedly influenced by optimistic reports on the progress of the war. General O'Daniel reported from Saigon that a French victory was likely if U.S. material support was forthcoming. On February 6, 1954, it was announced that forty B-26 bombers and 200 U.S. technicians to service them would be sent to Indochina. Admiral Radford told a House Foreign Relations Subcommittee, a month before the siege of Dien Bien Phu began (March, 1954), that the Navarre Plan was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war." 5/

At the Berlin Quadripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in February, however, Secretary Dulles was forced to give in on the French demand that Indochina be placed on the Geneva agenda. Bidault pressured the U.S. by threatening to scuttle the project for the European Defense Community which then was at the top of U.S. priorities. Dulles could not block Paris' determination to discuss Indochina at Geneva for it was, in the last analysis, France's war. He must have realized that the Laniel Government could not completely avoid negotiations without alienating itself from popular opinion and bringing about its downfall at the hands of the anti-war opposition parties.

The United States successfully opposed Soviet efforts at Berlin to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power, and successfully held out, furthermore, for the inclusion in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition, not already accorded, would be implied either in the invitation to, or the holding of, the Geneva Conference. 6/

2. The Ely Mission (March 20 - 24)

a. Dien Bien Phu Begins

On March 13, 1954, the VPA, under the direct command of General Giap, began its assault upon Dien Bien Phu. This fortress in Northern Vietnam was to take on a political and psychological importance far out of proportion to its actual strategic value because of the upcoming Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh correctly foresaw that a show of decisive force, not to mention a victory, would markedly strengthen their hand at the conference. Further, a defeat of the French Union forces would sap the will of the French nation to continue the struggle. The Viet Minh were greatly helped by a substantial increase in the level of Chinese military aid including artillery and radar. 7/ As the battle developed, the optimism which had pervaded Washington statements, public and private, on the war was replaced with the conviction that unless new steps were taken to deal with Chinese aid, the French were bound to go under.

General Paul Ely, French Chief of Staff, arrived in Washington on March 20 to confer with U.S. officials on the war situation. Ely's principal aims were to obtain American assurance of air intervention in the event of Chinese aerial attack, and to obtain further U.S. material assistance, especially B-26 bombers. Dulles told Ely that he could not then answer regarding U.S. response to Chinese air intervention. 8/ Ely subsequently contended in his Mémoires that he received a promise from Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to push for prompt American approval of interdiction should the contingency arise. 9/ As to the supply of bombers, twenty-five additional B-26's were promised.

b. Operation Vulture (Vautour)

According to subsequent French reports, General Ely was asked to stay 24 hours longer than planned in Washington, during which time Admiral Radford made an informal but major proposal to him. Radford is said to have suggested a nighttime raid against the perimeter of

Dien Bien Phu by aircraft of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. The plan, named Operation Vulture, called for about sixty B-29's to take off from Clark Field near Manila, under escort of 150 fighters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, to conduct a massive strike against VPA positions on the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu. 10/

Operation Vulture, according to French sources, was conceived by a joint American-French military staff in Saigon. It is admitted to have been an informal proposal which had not as yet received full U.S. Government backing as policy. No record of Operation Vulture has been found in files examined. In an interview in 1965, Admiral Radford stated that no plans for "Operation Vulture" existed, since planning to aid Dien Bien Phu by an air strike never proceeded beyond the conceptual stage. 11/ Nevertheless, such an operation probably was the subject of informal discussions both in Vietnam, and between Radford and Ely. *no memo?*

3. "United Action" as an Alternative to Either Negotiations or to Unilateral U.S. Intervention

a. Formulation of U.S. Policy

By late March the internal debate within the Eisenhower Administration had reached the point where it was recognized that: (a) unilateral U.S. intervention in the Indochina War would not be effective without ground forces; (b) the involvement of U.S. ground forces was logistically and politically undesirable; (c) preferably, "free world" intervention in Indochina to save the area from communism would take the form of a collective operation by allied forces. This was the import of the NSC deliberations, the Ridgway Report, the Report of Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, and President Eisenhower's general train of thought (see Tab 1).

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in his discussions with General Ely went beyond the question of immediate assistance to the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu and broached the possible establishment of a regional defense arrangement for Southeast Asia.

This proposal was given public exposure in Secretary Dulles' speech of March 29 before the Overseas Press Club. Dulles described the importance of resisting communist aggression in Indochina in these words:

"If the Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indo-China or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against the other free peoples in that area.

"The propagandists of Red China and of Soviet Russia make it perfectly apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia.

"Now Southeast Asia is an important part of the world. It is the so-called 'rice bowl' ... It is an area that is rich in many raw materials ...

"And in addition to these tremendous economic values, the area has great strategic value ... Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand ... The entire western Pacific area, including the so-called 'offshore island chain,' would be strategically endangered."

He then went on call for "united action," and after noting Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, prophesied that aggression would "lead to action in places by means of the free world's choosing, so that the aggression would surely cost more than it would gain." 12/

In the following weeks the aim of U.S. diplomacy was to secure allied agreement to a collective defense pact consisting of ten nations: the U.S., France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the three Associated States. Secretary Dulles presented his proposal in discussions with British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins and French Ambassador Henri Bonnet. President Eisenhower addressed a personal message to Prime Minister Churchill explaining the proposed coalition. The President noted that:

"Geneva is less than four weeks away. There the possibility of the Communists driving a wedge between us will, given the state of mind in France, be infinitely greater than at Berlin. I can understand the very natural desire of the French to seek an end to this war which has been bleeding them for eight years. But our painstaking search for a way out of the impasse has reluctantly forced us to the conclusion that there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in its essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement. The first alternative is too serious in its broad strategic implications for us and for you to be acceptable....

"Somehow we must contrive to bring about the second alternative."

President Eisenhower went on to outline the need for a coalition willing to fight the Communists, if this proved necessary. He concluded with a historical question certain to appeal to Churchill:

"If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unit and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?..." 13/

In these discussions the United States sought generally to stiffen the will of the free nations in the Indochina crisis. It emphasized both the avowed intention of France to grant real independence to the Associated States, and the condition accepted by the French at Berlin for the United States' agreeing to discuss Indochina at Geneva. That condition was that France would not agree to any arrangement which would directly or indirectly result in the turnover of Indochina to the Communists. The United States sought solid support for this position, especially from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Although the possibility was held out of future involvement of the United Nations in the Indochina problem, there was no thought of immediate UN action.14/

b. Initial Allied Reaction to "United Action"

Thailand and the Philippines gave a favorable response to the call for united action. The British response was one of caution and hesitancy. Churchill accepted Eisenhower's suggestion that Secretary Dulles go to London for further talks, but the British saw dangers in pressing for a defensive coalition before the Geneva conference. Eden was determined not to be "hustled into injudicious military decisions." As Eden later wrote:

"I welcomed the American proposal for the organization of collective defence in South-East Asia, since this would contribute to the security of Malaya and Hong Kong and would remove the anomaly of our exclusion from the A.N.Z.U.S. Pact, to which the United States, Australia and New Zealand were party. But I felt that to form and proclaim a defensive coalition, before we went to the conference table, would be unlikely to help us militarily and would harm us politically, by frightening off important potential allies. By the beginning of May, the rains would be starting in Indo-China and extensive campaigning by either side would be impossible for several months. Since the complete collapse of the French military effort before then was improbable, I did not think that concern for the immediate military situation should be the guiding factor in our policy." 15/

c. French Call for U.S. Intervention at Dien Bien Phu (April 4-5)

The French response to the proposal for united action was overtaken by military events at Dien Bien Phu. Foreign Minister Bidault contended on April 5 that the time for a coalition approach had passed and that the fate of Dien Bien Phu would be decided in the next ten days. 16/ The previous day Ambassador Douglas Dillon was called to an emergency Sunday cabinet meeting and was informed by Bidault, in the company of Laniel, that "immediate armed intervention of U.S. carrier aircraft at Dien Bien Phu is now necessary to save the situation." Bidault, reporting Navarre's desperate state in the field and the extent of Chinese

intervention in support of General Giap's forces, asked the Ambassador point-blank for U.S. action, saying that "the fate of Southeast Asia now rested on Dien Bien Phu," and that "Geneva would be won or lost depending on outcome" of the battle. 17/ The United States was now being called upon to act quickly and unilaterally to save a local situation, rather than, as Dulles desired, in concert with Asian and Western Allies.

d. U.S. Decision Not to Intervene Unilaterally

In the first week of April it became clear that the question of U.S. intervention was now crucial. Fighting at Dien Bien Phu reached major proportions as Chinese-supplied artillery pounded the French and drove them backwards. Without an early intervention by an external power, or group of powers, the French position at Dien Bien Phu was likely to be overrun. In anticipation of the French request for intervention, the Eisenhower Administration decided to consult with Congressional leaders. The President appears to have thought that Congressional support was vital for whatever active role the U.S. might now take in Indochina.

Available Government documents do not provide details of the two meetings to be described below. However, on the basis of seemingly reliable published sources, it appears that on April 3 Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford met with eight Congressmen (three Republicans and five Democrats) at the State Department. 18/ Radford apparently outlined a plan for an air strike on the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) at Dien Bien Phu using 200 planes from the aircraft carriers Essex and Boxer, stationed on maneuvers in the South China Sea. An unsuccessful air strike might need to be followed by a second air strike, but ground forces were not envisaged at this stage. It has been averred that there were atomic bombs on the aircraft carriers which could be delivered by the planes, but there is no indication that there was any serious consideration given to using nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu or elsewhere in Indochina. In the event of a massive Chinese troop intervention, however, it is quite possible that the U.S. would have retaliated with strategic nuclear weapons against targets in China.

The Congressional leaders raised questions about the amount of allied support for such an action, about the position of the other Joint Chiefs, about the need for ground forces if a second air strike also failed, and about the danger of a mammoth Chinese intervention which could transform Indochina into another Korean-type war. Radford apparently was forced to admit that he was the only one of the Joint Chiefs who favored the intervention plan. Dulles conceded that the allies had not as yet been consulted. In consequence, Dulles, who had been thinking of a joint Congressional resolution authorizing Presidential use of U.S. air-naval power in Indochina (which it is alleged he had ready in his pocket) left the meeting without the vital support he needed. The Congressional leaders laid down three conditions necessary for their support: (a) formation of an allied "coalition"-type force; (b) a French declaration

indicating an intent to accelerate independence for the Associated States;
(c) French agreement to continue their Expeditionary Corps in Indochina.
Thus Congressional opposition put the brake on a possible unilateral U.S.
intervention. 19/ According to a subsequent State Department Summary:

"It was the sense of the meeting that the U.S. should not intervene alone but should attempt to secure the cooperation of other free nations concerned in Southeast Asia, and that if such cooperation could be assured, it was probable that the U.S. Congress would authorize U.S. participation in such 'United Action.'" 20/

The following day, April 4, Dulles and Radford met with the President at the White House. The President reached the decision to intervene only upon the satisfaction of the three conditions necessary for the U.S. "to commit belligerent acts" in Indochina. There would have to be a coalition "with active British Commonwealth participation"; a "full political understanding with France and other countries," and Congressional approval. 21/

President Eisenhower clearly did not want the U.S. to intervene alone. He also was very concerned with having broad Congressional support for any step which might involve the U.S. in a war. As Sherman Adams later observed:

"Having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea when he had United Nations support, he [Eisenhower] was in no mood to provoke another one in Indo-China by going it alone in a military action without the British and other Western Allies. He was also determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress. He had had trouble enough convincing some Senators that it was even necessary to send small groups of noncombatant Air Force technicians to Indo-China." 22/

e. British Oppose "United Action"

From April 11 to 14, Secretary Dulles visited London and Paris to attempt to obtain British and French commitments to support his proposal for "United Action." According to President Eisenhower, Dulles felt that he had been given assurance of Congressional support for "United Action" if the allies approved his plan. 23/

Dulles found the British opposed to any type of collective military action prior to the Geneva Conference. Dulles explained, according to Eden's account, that the U.S. had concluded that the French could no longer deal with the situation in Indochina, militarily or politically, alone. If the French position in Indochina collapsed, the consequences in the rest of Southeast Asia would be grave. U.S. air and naval forces were

ready to intervene and some aircraft carriers had already been moved from Manila to the Indochina coast. On reflection, said Dulles, he had thought that the U.S. should not act alone in this matter and that an ad hoc coalition might be formed which might develop later into a Southeast Asia defense organization. This in itself would deter China from further interference in Indochina and would strengthen the western position at Geneva by giving evidence of solidarity. 24/

Eden was not convinced. He drew a distinction between the long term issue of collective security in Southeast Asia -- which might well be guaranteed by treaty after Geneva -- and the more immediate question of "united action" in Indochina. He was opposed to any military action or warning announcement before Geneva. The British were willing to provide the French with full diplomatic support at Geneva, either as a guarantor of the final settlement or as a participant in multilateral talks if a settlement failed to materialize. In the latter case, the British were prepared to discuss a collective defense formula that would comprehend any non-Communist portion of Indochina formed as the result of the Geneva deliberations. But they would not, prior to Geneva, commit themselves to united action.

Britain's distinction between the appropriateness of a united approach after, as opposed to before, the Conference was founded on serious doubts about the true import of united action. As Dulles correctly judged, behind Britain's push for a settlement was the "fear that if fighting continues, we will in one way or another become involved, thereby enhancing risk of Chinese intervention and possibility further expansion of war." 25/ Eden charged that action prior to the Conference would not only destroy chances for a peaceful settlement, but would critically raise the risk of a wider war. American planning admitted the strong possibility of direct Chinese intervention, and his own intelligence staff had concluded that Western involvement would bring on the Chinese by land and air once the Viet Minh effort became "seriously endangered." 26/

Thus, while Dulles was angered at the way he felt the British were writing off Indochina, Eden was highly pessimistic about Dulles' militancy in an area of uncertain value for which the United States had ambiguous, high-risk plans. There was considerable difference, in Eden's mind, between warnings to Communist China against direct intervention before the fact (which the British went along with in mid-1953) and united action, which would, despite any allied assurances to Peking, be interpreted by the Chinese as provocative. 27/

British suspicions, furthermore, were an extension of the belief that Indochina need not be entirely lost at Geneva in the absence of united action. London was apparently puzzled by American talk of the "loss" of Indochina, for to 10 Downing Street, "French cannot lose the war between now April 1954 and the coming of the rainy season however badly they may conduct it." 28/ While Dulles kept telling the British that only united action through the formation of a coalition could ensure

against a complete Communist diplomatic triumph at Geneva, Eden was equally convinced that the best way to assure continuation of the war would be united action, and that the French, even after Dien Bien Phu, were still strong enough to prevent the Communists from gaining all Indochina.

Even before Dulles' April flight to London to sound out the British on united action, the Churchill government was closely questioning American evaluations of Indochina. In an April 1 cable, for instance, Dulles vented his disturbance at Britain's refusal to accept the view that the loss of Indochina would ultimately affect their security interests in Malaya, Australia; and New Zealand. 29/ This was indeed the case, as Dulles discovered for himself once he talked to Eden in London and later at Geneva. Eden steadfastly refused to buy Dulles' analogy between Indochina and Malaya, retorting that the situation in Malaya was "well in hand" while that in Indochina was clearly not. 30/ Admiral Radford concluded in late April from talks with the British chiefs of staff that the U.K. policy seemed "to be on a very narrow basis strictly in terms of local U.K. interest without regard to other areas of the Far East such as Japan." 31/

The British simply could not accept the domino principle even as they admitted Southeast Asia's security value to the free world. By the opening of the Geneva Conference, the U.S.-U.K. relations had reached a low point: Dulles was insisting that the British were the major roadblock to implementation of united action, while Eden was clinging to the notion that a negotiated settlement leading to partition would be the best outcome of an impossibly complex politico-military situation in Indochina.

f. French Oppose "United Action"

Secretary Dulles fared little better in selling "united action" in Paris than he did in London, but for somewhat different reasons. The French were seeking a quick action to avoid an imminent military defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Dulles, however, refused to be torn from a collective allied approach to the Indochina War. The French feared that a coalition arrangement would lead to an internationalization of the war and take control of it out of their hands. They, therefore, only desired local assistance at Dien Bien Phu along the lines of Operation Vulture.

Furthermore, another objection to "united action" from the French viewpoint was that it would only delay or impede the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. The U.S. objective was to keep alive the French determination to continue the war. Dulles feared that the French would use Geneva to find a face-saving formula for a French surrender. Premier Laniel reaffirmed to Dulles in Paris that his government would take no action which directly or indirectly turned Indochina over to the Communists. But he also called attention to the increasing desire on the part of many in France to get out of Indochina at any cost. The French stressed that it was necessary

to await the results of the Geneva Conference and that they could not give the impression in advance that they believed Geneva would fail. 32/

g. Aborted Working Group on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia (April 20).

Immediately upon returning to Washington on April 15 Secretary Dulles invited representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand to attend a meeting on the 20th to set up an ad hoc defense group for the Southeast Asia region. The delegates were to work on a draft for a future organization. The Secretary had been under the impression from his talk in London with Eden that the U.K., while rejecting immediate "united action" in Indochina, would have no objection to such a preliminary meeting.

On April 18, just two days before the scheduled meeting, the British Ambassador informed Dulles that there would be no British participation. The reasons: no understanding on the part of the British Foreign Secretary that the working group would go forward at once, and no agreement concerning membership. The Department expressed amazement, but in view of the British attitude the April 20 meeting was transformed into a general briefing for the nations comprising the allied side at the Geneva Conference. In a later explanation of the shift in British attitude, Foreign Secretary Eden said that in agreeing to informal working group talks he had overlooked the pending Colombo Conference and that he felt that it would have been most undesirable to give any public indication of membership in a program for united action before the end of the Colombo discussions. 33/ It is now clear that the British were restrained by India and by a fear that British attendance at the meeting would be construed as assent to "united action." 34/ Moreover, London could not have been reassured by a "trial balloon" speech of Vice President Nixon on April 17 in which he suggested that the U.S. might have to "take the risk now by putting our boys in" in order to avoid "further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina." 35/

h. Continued French Prodding for U.S. Intervention (April 21-25)

In preparation for the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference, tripartite discussions (U.S., U.K., France) took place in Paris in mid-April. In these discussions, the French contended that a successful Geneva settlement was dependent on a favorable outcome of the battle at Dien Bien Phu and that their participation in a Southeast Asian coalition might not be possible if Dien Bien Phu fell. There could be no guarantee what position France would take in the event of a collapse at Dien Bien Phu. The French argued that only large-scale United States air and naval intervention could retrieve the situation in Indochina. They made no formal request for intervention in the tripartite discussions, but on several occasions suggested or implied to the Americans that such action was necessary. 36/

On April 21, Marc Jacquet, French Secretary of State for the Associated States, told the American Ambassador to Indochina, Donald Heath, then in Paris, that no French military authority still believed a victory was possible in Indochina without United States air and naval intervention, and that such action should be indicated after the impending failure of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference. 37/

On April 22, Foreign Minister Bidault, with General Ely, suggested to Secretary Dulles that there should be emergency consultation between General Navarre and American military commanders in Indochina. The Foreign Minister indicated that, although he had been opposed to internationalizing the war, he would now favor it with United States participation if that would save Dien Bien Phu. 38/

On April 23 the French Under Secretary of State, André Bougenot, in the presence of Premier Laniel, suggested to Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor of the Department of State, that the United States could commit its naval aircraft to the battle at Dien Bien Phu without risking American prestige or committing an act of belligerency by placing such aircraft, painted with French insignia and construed as part of the French Foreign Legion, under nominal French command for an isolated action consisting of air strikes lasting two or three days. 39/

On the same day Foreign Minister Bidault showed the Secretary a message from General Navarre in which the French commander said that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was desperate and that he believed that the only alternatives were (1) Operation VAUTOUR, massive B-29 bombing (which Secretary Dulles understood would be a United States operation from bases outside Indochina), or (2) a French Union request for a cease-fire (which the Secretary assumed would be at Dien Bien Phu only, but which General Navarre, as it turned out, meant should apply to all of Indochina). 40/

4. Final U.S. Position Before Geneva

a. Exchanges with the French

The American response to these various suggestions was to reiterate to the French the necessary preconditions for American intervention: (1) complete independence for the Associated States; (2) Congressional authorization; (3) a coalition that would include the United Kingdom. 41/ In relation to the need for a coalition, Secretary Dulles in Paris and Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith in Washington suggested to French officials that France, in the same way as it had asked for American air intervention in Indochina, should appeal for British intervention there. 42/

Before leaving Paris for Geneva, Secretary Dulles gave Foreign Minister Bidault a letter replying to General Navarre's suggestion that United States air intervention at Dien Bien Phu was the sole alternative to a cease-fire. In this letter, the Secretary stated again the necessary

preconditions for United States intervention, and contended that if Dien Bien Phu fell there was no reason that this should make it necessary to plead for a cease-fire. 43/ The French Foreign Minister, in a letter limited to the military consequences of United States intervention, replied that in the opinion of French military experts "a massive intervention of American aviation would still be able to save the garrison." 44/

b. Exchanges with the U.K.

In the discussions with the British, meanwhile, the United States had tried both to induce the United Kingdom to participate in a joint Anglo-American air and naval intervention at Dien Bien Phu and to persuade the United Kingdom that the prompt organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia was necessary to bolster the French in Indochina. 45/

But the British indicated that they would make no commitment to intervene militarily in Indochina and wished to postpone conversations on collective defense arrangements until after the Geneva Conference. Foreign Secretary Eden told Secretary Dulles on April 24 that the British did not want at this juncture to intervene in the Indochina War. 46/ Immediately afterward Eden returned to London for a special Cabinet meeting on the Indochina crisis which was held on April 25. Prime Minister Churchill reported to the House of Commons two days later that the British Government was "not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indochina in advance of the results of Geneva," and had "not entered into any new political or military commitments." 47/ Before addressing the Commons, Churchill had rejected a plea from French Ambassador René Massigli, made on behalf of Premier Laniel, for a statement that Great Britain would join the United States and France in defense of Dien Bien Phu. 48/

The United Kingdom was willing, however, to participate in early military discussions to consider measures which might be taken in Southeast Asia if Indochina were lost. Along these lines, Foreign Secretary Eden and Secretary Dulles had discussed tentatively on April 22 the possibility of a secret military appraisal -- by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand -- of what could be done to bolster Thailand in the event of a French collapse in Indochina. The Foreign Secretary had returned to this proposition in another conversation with Secretary Dulles the next day. 49/

On April 30, indicating that the British were prepared to defend the area outside Indochina, and possibly the free part of a partitioned Indochina, Eden proposed to Secretary Dulles "an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for Southeast Asia, namely: (a) nature and purpose; (b) membership; (c) commitments." He added that this examination should also cover immediate measures to strengthen Thailand. 50/

Secretary Dulles raised the question of early military talks that might strengthen the French position at the Geneva Conference at a meeting in Geneva on May 2 with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, partners of the United States in the ANZUS organization. The three agreed at this meeting that there should be five-power military talks in Washington among the ANZUS powers, the United Kingdom, and France, with the possible participation of Thailand. 51/

c. The Washington Viewpoint

In Washington in the meantime, the President on April 26, the opening date of the Geneva Conference, told a group of Republican leaders that it would be a "tragic error" for the United States to intervene unilaterally as a partner of France in the Indochina struggle. 52/ Two days later, in a discussion with Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith, Presidential Assistant Robert Cutler, and Admiral Radford (who had just been to London and had talked with the British Chiefs of Staff and Prime Minister Churchill), 53/ the President expressed disappointment over the British attitude of refraining from active participation in discussions on a Southeast Asian collective security arrangement before the end of the Geneva Conference. President Eisenhower, in this discussion, reiterated his firm decision that there would be no United States military intervention in Indochina by executive action. He urged his aides to provide help to the French in repairing three airfields in Indochina but to avoid any undue risk of involving the United States in combat operations. 54/

The feasibility of American intervention at Dien Bien Phu was finally removed with the fall of that fortress on May 7. President Eisenhower sent messages to the President of France, René Coty, and to the Chief of State of Vietnam, Bao Dai, praising the defenders of Dien Bien Phu and stressing the determination of the free world to remain "faithful to the causes for which they fought." 55/

5. Reappraisal of Domino Theory After Dien Bien Phu

The fall of Dien Bien Phu, and the failure to organize an intervention through "united action" prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference in late April, 1954, led to a reappraisal of the "domino theory" which had been at the center of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia since the late 1940's. The loss of Tonkin, or Vietnam, or perhaps even all of Indochina, was no longer considered to lead inexorably to the loss to Communism of all of Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in a press conference on May 11 (four days after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu) observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without perhaps Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." He went on to note that although he would not want to underestimate the importance of these countries he would not want either to give the impression that "if events that we could not control, and which we do not anticipate, should lead to their being lost that we would

consider the whole situation hopeless and we would give up in despair ..."
56/ In a remark at the press conference that was later deleted from the
official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important
but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager
populations. 57/

Later, as the U.S. became reconciled to a political settlement
at Geneva which would yield northern Vietnam to the Ho Chi Minh regime,
the concept of "united action" was given a new twist. It now was trans-
formed into an attempt to organize a long-range collective defense alliance
which would offset the setback in Indochina and prevent further losses.
That long-feared setback was now perceived to be less serious than had
once been envisaged. The loss of Tonkin was no longer seen as leading
necessarily to a Communist take-over of other territory between China and
the American shore. Eventually, in SEATO, the U.S. sought to create an
alliance which would be strong enough to withstand the fall of one such
domino.